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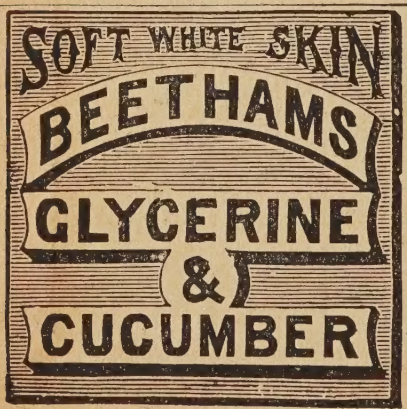

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DR. BERNARD ST. VINCENT

BY

HUME NISBET

AUTHOR OF

'BAIL UP!' 'THE SAVAGE QUEEN,' 'THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART,' ETC.

A NEW EDITION

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1893

Dedicated to

MY OLD AND TRUE FRIEND

DR. WM. McCOWAN

WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARDS

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

SYDNEY, with its famed harbour, is the fairest and most picturesque of Australian cities. It has also been distinguished as the site chosen by criminals for some of the most revolting atrocities ever committed by the human race.

Phil May has given, in his 'Winter Annual,' a characteristic sketch of the Sydney larrikin, which depicts with fidelity that most objectionable of all Australian outcomes. As I regard the well-known features of the young animal, I am drawn back in imagination to Sydney, with its sun-laved streets, sapphire-tinted, many-bayed harbour, awful steam tram-cars, and astounding post-office decorations, its fearsome 'roughs,' and 'ornamented' telegraph-wires; so that while I enjoy the beauties I cannot

forget the art abominations, and therefore am forced to connect the two, and think upon the villains of my story as I think upon those boy murderers of the Parramatta River who sought to outvie Burke and Hare, or the Indian Thugs.

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent is not a fiction, any more than the Sydney larrikin is one. My study aims at depicting the character of a remorseless villain who, for a time, hid his tiger-like instincts under the guise of an honest man, with the odic woman who acted as his accomplice during his last, and happily discovered, atrocity.*

The gay and gallant pseudo-Count Victor Linski may also be remembered by old residents, whom he victimized before he sailed away in his borrowed yacht. I do not know whether the 'New Chum' hotel still entertains man and beast down by the Sydney Wharf; but it stood there once upon a time, and the scenes there described as enacted

* Of course, I will not insult the faculty by apologizing for this ignoble usurper of the title M.D. Happily for trusting humanity, even indifferently good men are the marked exceptions to this humane profession, noble and self-sacrificing heroes the rule.

are not all the outcome of the author's imagination.

My doctor's boy, John Wilks, must be taken as a very ordinary type of the Australian smart boy, with his Latin quotations; for there is hardly an Australian message-boy who does not feel within him the qualifications of a future Governor, or at least of a future legislator, of his native land. And this is the hardship of being older than twenty in Australia—you run the risk of being regarded as antiquated and obsolete by those bright, sun-matured stoics of seven.

It is consoling, however, to us fog-dwellers, who ripen so slowly, to reflect how quickly these gay young midges will have to take the shelf—not every one, of course, for with such examples as Sir Henry Parkes before us, we must be careful not to be too sweeping with our conclusions as to the limit or date of brain-power, even under the influence of champagnic air and golden suns. The Greeks were ever a youthful race, and so I think will be the Australians—but there were a great number of sages amongst the Greeks, as there

are in New South Wales, as well as her sister colonies.

The native poet and the native painter have yet to come to Australia; and when they come to hand in their regal power, we shall see all such abominations as the present post-office, steam tram-cars and decorated telegraph-cables swept away, and then Sydney will sit at the top of her beautiful harbour like a Colonial queen, while the extra-smart boy will learn to be subdued, and the unmentionable larrikin will be properly smothered.

I look hopefully forward to Time for the solution of all these difficulties, and will now only beg my reader's indulgence for thus introducing to his notice, for the sake of its psychological interest, one of the dark pages of Sydney history.

H. N.

Hogarth Club,
36, Dover Street, W.

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DR. BERNARD ST. VINCENT

PROLOGUE.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA.—AN ESCAPE FROM CAGE ROADS.

I.

'I TELL you, man, the thing is impossible, even with the boldest swimmer. These waters are infested with sharks, and, without taking into consideration the distance between this and Fremantle, I wouldn't give twopence for the life of the fellow who would try it on. No, no, my friend; the boys know better than try that game here.'

'Still, I think it is most unwise to let so many of these desperadoes go about unironed.'

'Tut! you have been reading "His Natural Life," and so got your brains steeped with the old-convict-

days stuff. We go in for a different system now—moral persuasion is the dodge. We want as much work out of our birds now as we can get, and no man can be expected to work with twenty or thirty pounds' weight of iron on his legs; so don't you go fretting your innocent young heart, for on board this hulk they are safe enough, with Nature's gaolers, the sharks, all around us.'

The speakers were two young subalterns, who lounged against the sides of one of the Government hulks lying between Rottnest Island and Fremantle, in the Cage Roads. They were smoking manilas and watching the convicts unloading the cargo of a ship which had dropped anchor that morning, bringing to them the long-looked-for mails and the eagerly-expected provisions from home.

The first speaker was an old stager at convict ways, albeit barely twenty years of age, while the other had just arrived with a fresh batch of 'canaries' (as the convicts were called) from the old country.

A bustling scene it was, with the broad morning sun blazing down upon it all—on the silent but

active convicts as they ran up and down the gangways with their loads upon their backs, watched narrowly by the soldiers on guard, so that they might not skulk from duty before the hour to rest was rung out. It was a bright scene now that the newly-arrived and chained gangs had all been transferred ashore, with that filmy sky luminous with sunlight, the deep waters dancing round like cobalt, and the distant shore, with the scattered houses gleaming snow-white amongst the dingy green of the brushwood or hay-tinted, sunburnt grasses, with the stretches of sand between like stripes of pale gold behind the ermine-like fringe of surf which bordered that azure mantle of shark-infested water.

The hour of noon now rang out from the ship's bell, and the convicts were marched off to the fore-part of the hulk to rest themselves and wolf their meagre supply of gaol rations, while the guard stood at ease, yet with rifles handy, as they also devoured their mid-day meal.

A mixed lot of unfortunates these convicts were: low-type ruffians squatting alongside of political

prisoners—pickpockets and patriots—without much discrimination now that they were garbed alike and assembled on common ground.

Still, at this hour of rest, each type gathered itself together, and spoke in half-whispers; the heavy criminals drew themselves apart from the lighter ones, while those who had been convicted for their opinions looked for the time being, as they assembled together, something like men.

Some of the groups were composed of two only, while others crowded in larger companies; the patriots and the worst-looking criminals were the most crowded together: the more isolated groups were what were termed the light gentry, who, by reason of their accomplishments, put on airs and held themselves apart.

Amongst these convict-aristocrats were two who paraded the limit of the deck allowed to them with jaunty steps—at least, one of them did, airily waving his hand about as he conversed with his companion—while the other prisoners viewed them with sullen respect as they passed—that is, with the exception of the political gangs, who only re-

garded the swaggering pair with amused indifference.

They were both celebrated swindlers of the first water, who had led lives of luxury in their palmy days, and who were therefore heroes to be respected by members of the Bill Sikes order.

The taller of the two, who swaggered the most jauntily, seemed to be about twenty-four or twenty-five, with a slim, well-built, gentlemanly figure, and bold, light-coloured blue eyes; and as he waved his grimy but slender fingers about—now making a joke for the benefit of the lenient guard when he drew near to them, to which they responded with grim laughter, for he was a favourite with them all, now stooping over his small companion—he did not appear as if the ignominy of his present position weighed very heavily upon him. His companion was undersized and white-faced, with small eyes of a bilious hue, yet sharp as gimlets.

'It is now or never, while the men are reading their letters from home, Tim, that we must do it; one more turn, and let's be off with a bang.'

This the taller young man muttered to his friend as they turned their backs on the guard.

'Jack, I dare not do it; did ye hear what them hofficer coves said about the sharks? Ugh! it makes me shiver to think on it.'

'Gammon! we must all die some time,' responded the other briskly, as they turned again to come towards the soldiery.

'I ken't, I tell ye, mate.'

'Then I must go alone. It's all prepared, and I'm on the job; the bell for work will sound in another moment, and that's my signal for going.'

They had now reached the guard once more, and Jack made a little jest as they wheeled round.

'There's a cove keeps up his pecker, you bet,' said one of the soldiers, as he looked after the jaunty one admiringly, then turned again to spell out his letter from home.

Just then the bell sounded for work, and the detached groups started to their feet, while the guards seized their guns and hastily crammed their letters into their pockets.

'Ta, ta, Tim, if we don't meet again,' exclaimed

Jack, as he suddenly stooped for a moment and grabbed at something from under an old sail; 'give the alarm, mate, and save yourself!'

With a flying leap he was over the side, while Tim ran towards the others, shouting out lustily:

'Man overboard!'

It was a glimpse and no more that the confused groups had of the escaped convict, a gleam of gray and yellow, as he darted over, followed by a loud splash from the sea.

'Hullo!' cried out the two subalterns, as they rushed out of the cabin, 'what's up now?'

'Man overboard!' shouted Tim.

'Convict trying to escape!' bawled the sergeant.

'I told you they would do it,' observed the fresh arrival to his sager friend.

'Poor devil, whoever he is!' responded his friend; 'he will never rise to the surface; however, we must out with the boats and be ready for him if he does.'

All, convicts as well as soldiers, by this time had rushed to the hulk-sides, and were looking over the ocean surface to see if the desperate

diver would rise again, while the boats were being manned to hunt for him and pick him up if he did.

Nothing was to be seen there, however, excepting two or three large rotten pumpkins which kept bobbing about to the motion of the waves at about a dozen or two yards from the ship's side.

II.

THERE was little time in the sinking and rising to make the change necessary, yet the desperate man did it.

As he sank his wits never left him, but with a rapid motion of his hand he fitted one of the pumpkins, which he had scooped out before, on to his head like a helmet; he had made small apertures for the eyes and for breathing, and so he rose to the surface, holding the one intended for his comrade in his left hand, while from the other he looked out towards the hulk, watching them as they were watching for him.

The idea of escape had come upon him that morning with the sight of those vegetables, which had been thrown aside as useless, and with his deft fingers he had managed, during the time the others were eating, to scoop out the mushy insides, pushing the others overboard as he passed them in those peregrinations to and fro after he had completed his task. Few chances occur in the experience of a convict for escape, but when the chance does occur, it is wonderful how swiftly some of those prison-sharpened faculties can seize upon it—they are like vultures on the wing.

As for the idea of sharks, which had made the more cautious Tim hold back, Jack, with the reckless philosophy of a thief, crushed down the thought, and by sheer strength of will kept his imagination in abeyance—until he was amongst the monsters.

He was a splendid swimmer, and as he plunged into the sea, feet first, he calculated the distance to which the other pumpkins had floated; the tide was setting towards the shore, so that he swam in that direction for a few yards, and then popped up,

half suffocated with his novel helmet, behind one or two of the others, and just before those on board the hulk had time to recover themselves enough to rush to the sides.

He would have been suffocated outright, but as it happened he came up directly behind an immense floating pumpkin, which for the moment hid his head and enabled him to snatch off his covering in time to empty the water from it and inhale a full breath, after which he fastened it on once more and through the small fingered punctures watched for his enemies.

Fortune also had so far favoured him with the sun, which, glinting with a white lustre on the shimmering waves, struck directly in the eyes of those who were watching from the deck, partially blinding them.

The sharks? Yes, they were there *en masse*, he could feel now by that horrible instinct which fish and swimmers have in tropic waters; as he dived with his eyes open, he could also see the dim, huge outlines as they darted from the sudden disturbance which he had made in their element, like hungry

but suddenly startled dogs; and as he observed this, a sudden inspiration born from despair darted through his mind—if motion frightened them so much, then the danger lay in keeping still, but as long as he kept moving he was comparatively safe. Therefore he tried to comfort himself with this hopeful reflection, being of a buoyant nature, while he rode upright upon the waters, moving his limbs about as rapidly as he could do underneath while trying to imitate the aimless bobbing about of the neighbouring pumpkins—moving as if aimlessly, yet ever seeking to direct his course towards the far-off shore.

Presently he saw the boats from the convict ship lowered and manned, while the guns from the fort boomed out to let the people at Fremantle know that a convict had escaped.

He saw them row about, here, there, and everywhere, watching keenly as they rowed; the pumpkins had casually caught their attention, and as they passed him one of the sailors aimed an idle blow with his oar at the empty one he held on his head; as a pumpkin would do under the circum-

stances, he immediately dived under the surface, swimming rapidly for a few yards under the water, and then coming up once again ahead of the boat and nearer the shore, where he could see them pass him without further notice and hear them as they talked about him.

'He'll never come up again; we may as well go back.'

Still they hung about for nearly half an hour longer, and then he saw them one after the other turn towards the ship and leave him to his fate.

Then he directed his attention to the shore; a dive under water always brought him some yards nearer, and when he could hold out no longer he came up to the surface to breathe and watch the motions of those on board.

He saw that the afternoon labour had begun again; once or twice, also, as he floated, a random shot came from the hulk; the idle subalterns were practising with the soldiers' rifles at the floating pumpkins; however, fortunately for him, they were not very good marksmen, so that their shots fell wide of the floating targets.

All through the long afternoon he swam, or rode uprightly by way of change, never daring to rest or keep still for a moment, with the haunting dread of these sea monsters upon him; he could not see them now, but he felt that they must be near, watching him and waiting, with the cruel patience of sharks, for the moment when he would become exhausted.

Sometimes, when he relaxed his efforts, he thought what a comfort it would be if he could only turn on his back and float! Instinct warned him, however, at these times that the sharks were swiftly stealing up, and that in another moment it would be too late; then he would wildly fling his limbs about and raise the foam around him, to hear the swish of the backward-darting and savage, but intensely timid, monsters of the sea —there is nothing so cowardly in reality as a shark, nor so voracious, except it be a true-born bully.

What a fearsome and long afternoon that was before he gained shallow water, with the horror growing as his brain and heart throbbed with the

wild agony of cureless fatigue! Liberty must be indeed a precious boon when men will risk so much to gain it.

With a thrill of wild delight his foot at last touched the sands, and with a fresh exertion he splashed the water about him as he put on a spurt and swam till he thought the water was shallow enough for safety.

Again he touched the ground, keeping the pumpkin-helmet still on a level with the surface. No, he was not out of danger yet, for the water, he reckoned, could not be lower than his breast, and the sharks would venture to that distance.

This was in reality his most dangerous moment, though he did not know it, for the ground sharks, savage at the sight of their victim escaping, would most likely make the rush before he got beyond their reach.

A sickening sensation grew upon him as he made another effort, paddling the water like a dog and splashing it up all over him; there were people on shore, but by this time they had given up watching for him, and only hung about (those who had

nothing else to do) smoking their pipes and enjoying the cooling breeze, ignorant that a brother man was struggling for life in the midst of those sapphire waves.

A few more yards and he may sit down and rest himself, but in those few yards lies his greatest danger.

Gaspingly he struggles on, with his heart pained to the bursting point and his brain sounding like a gong which has been struck, while his arms and legs feel as if they were made of lead, or as if he were trying to move in a nightmare.

Six more strokes, and he will be in shallow enough water. He had not yet learnt to pray, this clever young swindler, but a mighty sob of fatigue and despair burst from his pent-up breast, which might answer for the same purpose, in this moment of his dire extremity, as he braced himself up for the final effort.

One, two, three, four, five, six!

Four more, and he would be out of danger for the time.

Three more strokes for dear life! Again he

spread out his weighted arms and legs languidly, for he is utterly past splashing any longer.

'Ha!'

He feels a clutch from behind and a sudden tug at his leg which drags him backward for a yard or two. They have got him at last!

What a rip he hears as the half-grounded monster snaps at his leg, just missing it, but tearing off the Government broad-arrow-stamped, wide trousers! and at the appalling sound mortal terror banishes fatigue, fear of consequences, and all other thoughts from his heart, for he yells shrilly like a madman as he frantically rushes over the sands, until he is in about three feet of water, after which he sinks down all of a heap, gabbling out an incoherent note of thanks for his deliverance.

There are two or three people on the sands, watching the setting sun, who hear the strange cry; but before they can look round he is once more out of sight, with only his pumpkin helmet to be seen; the ground sharks have returned sullenly to sea, tearing their prize, the convict

trousers, to tiny shreds as they quarrel over it amongst themselves, now that the living victim is beyond their reach.

* * * * *

Amongst the loafers on the sea-sand lies a boy clad in duck trousers and red flannel shirt; he has been sleeping there all the afternoon, his face hidden on his folded arms, for he lies back upwards. At the awful sound he wakes and looks hastily about him; then, seeing nothing, covers his face once more and seemingly goes to sleep.

Meantime the sun sinks down all orange, red and purple over by Rottnest Island and the Government ships which lie rocking in the roads—purple and dun-coloured clouds, through which run livid seams of golden and scarlet fire—and now the black fins of the sharks are to be seen here and there dotting the surface of the deeply-toned blue ocean, while on the crests of the waves can be seen streaks of vermilion, which sparkle above the intense blue.

Eight o'clock, and the seashore is deserted by all excepting that sleeping boy and the convict, who still

squats with cramped naked legs in that three feet of water.

Then the short twilight fades and darkness steals over the land—a darkness which is softened by the luminous stars now studding the black-blue sky.

The convict has been eight hours in the water, when at last he rises, pitching from him his protecting pumpkin, and staggers with bare legs towards the prostrate youth, whom he stoops over and touches lightly.

'Jack!'

The boy springs up suddenly, making a clutch at the half-naked man.

'Have you got the toggery, Dinah?'

'Yes, Jack; but I could only get one horse.'

'That will do.' Jack's teeth are chattering like castanets with the exposure and cold. 'Have you minded a drop of anything? I am chilled to death.'

'Here you are, Jack; the very best brown brandy I could get at Fremantle.'

The boy pulls out a flask from his shirt and holds

it up to the blue lips of the convict, who gurgles it down greedily.

'That's better. Now, where is the horse and rig-out?'

'This way, Jack.'

The boy puts his arm through the dripping wet sleeve of the convict and leads him rapidly away into the darkness, which presently swallows them both up.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE SURGERY.

'ARE you not well, dear?'

'Yes—yes, well enough, Blanche. Why do you ask?'

'Because I have several reasons for thinking you have not been quite up to tone lately, but the principal one is that you took no breakfast this morning, and never even noticed that you did not; and when a man has been four months married, as you have, and plays with an empty cup, as you did, instead of taking the cup which his dear little wife has risen to pour out for him, then, I think, it is about time to inquire if he is well. Don't you also think so, Bernard, as a professional man?'

'Was that so, Baby?'

'Yes, and it isn't as if you were on your honeymoon or in love, you know, for you forgot more than the tea.'

'What else did I forget?'

'Oh, I'll not remind you, if you cannot think of it for yourself.'

Blanche turned quietly away from her husband, and, lifting up a paper-knife, began to cut the leaves of a new novel.

'Oh yes, I do declare I did forget to kiss you when I left you; come, let me make up for my mistake,' and, reaching over the side of his chair to where his wife stood, Dr. Bernard St. Vincent drew her face down to his and kissed her twice. 'There, little wife, will that please you?'

'Yes, Bernard; but it is one of those things I hope I shan't have to *ask for* often.'

'Forgive me, darling, and run out of my shop, if the consultation is over, as I expect other patients.'

'Very well, doctor; only remember I intend to be your physician this afternoon, and introduce you to my old school-friend, Kathleen Wilford. Her hus-

band and she arrived from Melbourne last night, and I have promised to call for her at the hotel and show her my Beast.'

'All right, Beauty, only you had better invite them here instead; then I may be able to unite pleasure and duty.'

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent took up his pen again and began writing as his young wife went out of the room; then, as the door closed behind her, he dropped it into the inkstand, and leaning his elbow on his desk and his head upon his clenched hand, he looked moodily out of the surgery window.

'Something must be done, and very soon too, or else I fear it is all up with this pack of cards; but what that something is to be the Lord may know, but I don't.'

To an ordinary spectator, Dr. Bernard St. Vincent had very little cause for grumbling with his surroundings or prospects. He was not yet twenty-eight, had a passable figure and a complexion of that pale, studious hue which interests the fair sex so quickly, features of a Jewish type, not too pro-

nounced, with dark-brown eyes which could look melancholy or passionate, as only Oriental eyes can do in male or female. A common enough face as far as regards expression and features, yet he had been lucky enough to gain the affection of one of the sweetest and fairest girls in Sydney (which is saying much in the matter of female beauty), and to get with his bride as her wedding portion her father's practice, one of the snuggest and most respectable in the city.

A twelvemonth before this morning on which he sat gazing moodily out of the window, he had come out to the colonies as a ship doctor, and without introduction or antecedents had been taken on as assistant by Blanche's father, who was at that time getting old and indolent.

Some people are born to silver spoons, others to even a better fate; golden luck seems to hang over them like a grateful shelter, and to follow them, no matter how fast they may run out to the uncertainty of a stormy world and fling away what would be to other people their best chances. With most of us 'there is a tide in our affairs which,

taken at the flood, leads on to fortune'—at least, so writes Shakespeare or Bacon (when our dilettanti can settle who wrote the plays); but with others Fortune appears to be for ever casting them upon rivers coming up to the flood which leads them on to prosperity without regard to their ability or inclination to clutch hold of the myriad chances held out to them.

Such a lucky mortal was Bernard St. Vincent. Out of about fifty applicants with first-class recommendations he only was accepted to fill the post of doctor to the ship coming out, although he had nothing beyond his diplomas to recommend him, and—yes, this is how luck served him. On the night before the decision the captain of the vessel chanced to be enjoying his pipe and solitary glass at a certain bar, into which by chance the doctor also strolled at the precise moment the skipper wanted a companion. A few words together and the honest captain became the young doctor's friend, passed a pleasant evening at the music-halls in his company, and next day cast his vote in his favour, while the other applicants with their

high recommendations had to go and wait a little longer.

On his arrival in Sydney, in the first paper he bought—the *Morning Herald*—he saw the advertisement for an assistant inserted by Dr. Mellibar of Wooloomooloo. He called during the day, was engaged at once, and, with the freedom of colonials, had the run of the house in no time.

Dr. Mellibar was old and inclined to take life easily, and the assistant was an agreeable companion and could tell racy stories when the gentlemen were by themselves, while he could also be very quiet and deferential when with the ladies.

Although the old doctor did not think very highly of the professional abilities of his new assistant, still, as it was only occasionally that intricate cases came under his care, the young fellow did well enough—looked well and dressed well, two very important points in a fashionable physician, and did not commit more blunders than medical men generally do in the course of a week, so that things went along very easily; for while the old man enjoyed his pipe and diluted spirits, the

assistant made himself agreeable all round, and won golden opinions from the ladies, young and old.

By-and-by the father observed what was going on at home and tried to stop it—as usual, when too late. Pretty little Blanche, his only daughter, heard his objections, put her soft arms about his neck, and, with her fair cheek against his rough whiskers, soon kissed away all those objections, and gained his reluctant consent that the pale-faced assistant should become his son-in-law.

So it happened that this remarkably lucky young man dropped into his place without an effort on his part—indeed, as if Fortune had pushed him on whether he would or not. Blanche idolized him as only a young girl can idolize her first love.

After the wedding the old doctor retired altogether from business, leaving his name-plate, however, still on the gate, so that the patients of Dr. Mellibar might not pass over his successor.

Blanche had experienced two great troubles in her life; the first was when her mother died about the time Blanche was six years old, and the next

one was when her father, the bluff old army doctor, expired quite suddenly exactly six weeks after she had found a husband.

He had always been a hard drinker and heavy smoker, but, living as much as he could in the open air, he could stand greater indulgence than more studious men.

Once, when a patient went to him for advice, he said:

'You have been drinking, sir, and must give it up.'

'No, doctor. I do drink a bit, like most men, but nothing to speak of; but perhaps it is the pipe —I smoke a deal.'

'Well, put in a peg.'

'Do you mean give 'em both up altogether?'

'Not at all; only drink and smoke in moderation, as I do.'

'How many glasses would you advise, doctor?'

'Well, judging from your constitution, I should say thirteen or fourteen glasses of good Scotch whisky couldn't hurt any man per day, only no more than fourteen, and see that it is Scotch.'

'And my tobacco limit?'

'Don't go beyond two dozen pipes, and you are safe.'

'Then I'm safe, doctor, for I can't do half that.'

'Lord, Lord! what is our colony coming to, when a man takes the shakes on a young maid's allowance?'

Six weeks after the young people were married the old man took his last pipe and glass of whisky with hot water in the pleasant company of his son-in-law, and when they went to call him next morning they found him dead—heart disease, so Dr. Bernard St. Vincent declared, and gave his certificate accordingly.

By the old man's death Blanche came in for five thousand pounds in cash, which she trustingly handed over to her dearly-loved husband.

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent was not very busy on this particular morning that our story opens; indeed, since the death of his father-in-law, old patients had dropped away and new ones did not come up; why, no one could precisely say, except that they had been used to the gruff old man, and

could not take all at once to the smooth young one.

Still, he had no cause to grumble so far as the ladies were concerned. During the afternoon they flocked up in considerable numbers, mostly that he might examine their pretty mouths, for he united dentistry with his other professions, as colonial doctors oft-times do; so that if he brooded on this bright morning it seemed very unreasonable on his part, his surgery being a comfortably-furnished one, and the view from the window all that mortal man could desire—a framework of semi-tropical trees and the turquoise-tinted harbour for a background, with its many points and bays right away to the heads.

'Five hundred pounds to the bad and not a stiver to meet it. What unlucky fiend has followed me for the past two months, making me lose every venture I have tried? And now this horse, which we were all so sure of, to go and miss! I dare not face up to my club for many more nights with apologies, and, think as I may, I can find no way out of it except by once more bolting.' He rose

from the table and took a few turns up and down the room. 'Phew! there's no use thinking any more about it now; something may turn up between this and to-morrow.—Wilks!'

'Yes, sir,' said John Wilks, page-boy and apprentice, as he entered the room.

'Has Mr. McTaggart come yet?'

'Yes, sir; he is working at Mrs. Barnett's teeth.'

'Then tell him to come here for a moment.'

The business lately had been drawing more towards dentistry than medicine, and for that he had engaged an assistant who understood this branch of the work—which he himself did not—thoroughly. This assistant, acting as coach and practical worker downstairs, while St. Vincent did the pretentious in the surgery, was by name William McTaggart, a Caledonian from Glasgow.

In a few moments McTaggart made his appearance—the last person one would suppose capable of handling teeth and gold settings: about six feet in height, with proportionate hands and feet, deliberate in his gestures, broad in his accent, dressed like an ordinary tradesman, and with the most expres-

sionless face one could expect to see on a human being.

The eyes were dull and veiled, and seemed as they looked up or caught the light to be unable to reflect or sparkle, the complexion was dark-tinted, and the beard unkempt. Clearly Mr. McTaggart had no vanity or desire to shine in the eyes of the fair sex.

'Weel, sir, ye wanted me, Johnny tells me.'

'Yes, Mr. McTaggart; I have to go out this morning, and would be obliged if you would look after the place for an hour or two.'

'Weel, sir, I'll dae it the best I can, sae lang as there's nane o' yer fine leddies come in.'

'Ah, they'll excuse you all right, they're getting used to your ways; only I wish for your own sake you'd wear a collar. It makes such odds on a man.'

This was said persuasively and patronizingly to the gaunt and powerful form which towered above him.

'I fear, sir, it would be out o' character, and the Sydney heat is rayther oppressive at this season for

the encumbrance o' a collar; besides, I am by nature somewhat uncultivated.'

'All right, old fellow, keep to your own style. I say, any tips to-day about the races?'

'Black Swan is the horse to back.'

'Why, he isn't on my list!'

'Maybe no, but then, you see, you are hand in glove wi' the horsey craft. I'm no'.'

'Why do you think he has a chance?'

'Oh, it's just a notion o' my ain.'

'Ah, I'll think of it. What's the odds?'

'Forty tae ane against him.'

'Have you anything on him?'

'A trifle.'

'I've a mind to hedge. Can you put me up?'

'Yes.'

'When?'

'Within the next half-hour.'

The doctor mused a few moments, while McTaggart watched him with his lid-veiled eyes.

'McTaggart, I am rather short of funds this morning. Could you be my sponsor for a fifty?'

'I might, sir—till when?'

'Next week.'

'Very well. You'll gie me an I.O.U.?'

'Certainly, certainly.'

At this moment the door opened and John Wilks appeared.

'There's a fellow at the door asking for you, sir.'

'A patient, I suppose; show him in. Now, McTaggart, go and put me down for that horse; I'll attend to this case till you return.'

'Ay, sir.'

McTaggart turned to go, and as he did so the door opened to admit the patient. As the dentist-assistant stood aside to let him pass, and looked at him, a blanker shade fell over his immobile features, and a more fishy film crept into his dull orbs, while as soon as the other had passed him he shambled out in front of the page-boy, John Wilks.

CHAPTER II.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

'GOOD-MORNING, sir,' observed the doctor blandly to his visitor, who slowly entered. 'Will you sit there?'

'Thanks! Dr. Bernard St. Vincent?'

'That is my name, at your service.'

'Ah! Will you allow me to take my coat off?'

'Certainly.'

The patient wore a light dust-coat, which he slowly removed. A tall, frail man, with a white mop of hair such as may be seen on old squatters, a matted gray beard, and clothes the worse for wear; he wore coloured glasses, and as the doctor waited with the professional air of subdued interest upon his face, he turned his back to lay down the

coat, taking off his glasses at the same moment and passing his handkerchief over his face.

'Wants a tooth drawn,' mentally observed the doctor.

'That's more comfortable,' observed the visitor, turning about and revealing the clean-shaven face of a young man with closely-cropped fair hair. 'How are you, old pal?'

To say that the doctor was astonished doesn't quite express his state—horror, hatred, and a haunting fear commingled were in his gesture and face as he sank down upon the couch opposite the consulting-chair, in which this metamorphosed visitor quietly placed himself.

'Jack Robson!'

'Surprised to see me again, I suppose, Dr. Bernard St. Vincent? Thought I was down among the dead men, eh?'

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent sat looking at his visitor as if he had been *tête-à-tête* with a ghost, but saying nothing.

'No, old chap, it wasn't me that they buried out in Western Australia, but a Fenian who had the

same cognomen; I got off also without being bolted by the sharks, as was generally supposed over there, and have had rather a rough time of it before I found out my old friend.'

'How did you find me out?' huskily asked the doctor, at last recovering his voice.

'Oh, my boy, it isn't difficult to know your particular *graft!* I was down Melbourne way when I read in the papers about the old man's death, and when I saw your verdict, *heart disease*, I went to the Free Library and looked up the old files; it became an easy matter to find out the date of the late Dr. Mellibar's son-in-law's arrival in the colonies—not long after my own—and what he was like, for, you see, the colonial papers go in for details.'

'But how came you to connect me with this Dr. Mellibar?'

'Because I knew you could not stop in England after——'

'I know; go on.'

'America is not quite big enough to take you back again, seeing that you and I have been there already; the Continent is no good with so many

on the same lay; so I felt sure of dropping upon you hereabouts, and I was just working my way up when the paper I mention struck my eye on the office board in Collin Street.'

'Well, Jack, I don't know whether to feel glad or sorry to see you again; but resume your disguise.'

'Are you in the least degree glad?' asked the other dubiously, as he once more made himself into an old man.

'A bit that way, I must confess.'

'Then, by Jove! you've spent all your wife's money, and I am, per usual, too late.'

'I can't say I am over-flush just this morning, but I have good prospects.'

'Ah! just so, just so! You require me, I see; you are once more in a mess.'

'Not exactly that.'

'Don't beat about the bush. I came here this morning to bleed you a bit out of that five thousand I heard you had got; but I see you have been, as you always were, an ass, only a confoundedly lucky one. Never mind, you can give me house-room

for a week or two if I need it, which most likely I won't, while I mature my plans, and I'll help you when I can.'

'As an old squatter?'

'No, my boy; I love the ladies and prefer the youthful dodge. I will leave you now, and I want you to let me have twenty quid to fit me out, for next time we meet you will meet me as a leader of Sydney society.'

'I don't know where I am to raise twenty pounds on so short a notice.'

'No meanness, my dear friend; you must raise it —pawn your horses, your wife's jewelry, the furniture, anything, but bring me the cash by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, or—*look out for squalls.*'

'Where do you put up?'

'At the "New Chum," Circular Quay; nice quiet place. Don't forget, doctor, or you'll regret it. Good-morning!'

CHAPTER III.

KATHLEEN WILFORD.

Dr. and Mrs. St. Vincent were waiting in the drawing-room for their afternoon callers; he had returned to lunch a little flushed, but otherwise good-natured, and more attentive to his wife than he had been for some time past, and she was in consequence happy and daring.

'Why do you keep that fellow McTaggart about you, Bernard? He is a perfect boor.'

'What is the matter with him now, Blanche?'

'The same as usual; I have been sent twice to the surgery to conciliate patients who were going away furious at his behaviour.'

'Ah! but did the patients try his skill?'

'I don't think they gave him the chance; his

atrocious jokes, in his clumsy attempts to make himself agreeable, prevented further advances.'

'That is just it; and yet he is, in spite of his appearance, the best man I ever met either for dentistry, medicine, or chemistry.'

'But, dear, society doesn't want the best man; it wants the best-looking man, and the most agreeable one, as you are *when you like*, you know.'

'That's not quite a compliment on my abilities, Blanche.'

'I didn't marry your abilities; I married yourself; and it is the same in the medical profession as it is in the love mart: the one who can interest *us* most will be the successful man.'

'Good enough argument in the hundred and one imaginary troubles which afflict humanity; but there are cases where the skilled hand is required, and dentistry is one of the few branches where skill and good workmanship are required, and for that I can always depend upon McTaggart.'

'But if you lose the practice papa left us for the sake of a skilled workman, what will be the use of all his skill?'

'Well, I have a lady's reason for keeping the fellow, if nothing else—he makes a good foil; his uncouth antics always make me show up better.'

'I fairly hate him, and wish you to get rid of him, Bernard!'

'I cannot just yet. He is too useful to me, and is teaching me something which I want to learn.'

'Then you will not dismiss the brute for my sake?'

'Don't ask me, darling; in a little while I will.'

'No, Bernard, I want it now.'

'I cannot.'

'You will not for my sake?

'No!'

He spoke decidedly and gruffly now, and, as his lips closed and his eyes contracted angrily, Blanche saw an uglier expression upon the loved features than she could have believed possible, and shrank from it with a strange chill at her heart.

'Don't bother me on business matters; I am worried enough at present.'

At this moment the door opened and the servant announced 'Mr. and Mrs. Wilford.'

'My old friend, how are you?'

Blanche forgot her vexation in the pleasure of seeing her friend, and advanced with laughing face and outstretched hands to meet her, while the young doctor smoothed his puckered brows and regarded the visitors with careless interest.

'Another of Blanche's fads, I suppose; but I wish she would choose good-looking women if *I* have to entertain them,' he muttered under his moustache, as he scrutinized the woman who quietly advanced to meet his effusive young wife.

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent was a sensualist of the grosser type, and liked to look upon well-developed figures. He had no sympathy with or for ethereal beauty; but even if such had been his taste, in the woman before him he would have found no cause for satisfaction.

Both ladies belonged to the blonde type, and were of similar height, colour of hair and eyes; but there the resemblance ended: while Blanche in every point had the decided advantage over her friend.

Her complexion had little colour in it—Sydney

girls are lilies, not roses—but it was clearly pure with health and vitality, and appeared doubly pure in contrast with the flush which overspread the brow and cheeks of the other with a uniform opaqueness and monotony. Of an equal age, between eighteen and nineteen, Blanche possessed a rounded, firm, yet graceful figure, well set up and free in action, the result of exercise and a good digestion; her hair was massive, and of that pure, lustrous golden hue in which the sunshine appears to linger and reflect; her eyebrows were well defined, and, what is somewhat rare in a very fair woman, they were golden brown, like the long eyelashes which shaded the deep limpid eyes, sometimes blue as sapphires, and at other moments warmly gray—frank, trusting eyes, which could sparkle and laugh. Her features were well moulded but not too perfectly formed for expression, with lips finely arched and moist, and small, dimpled chin—a beautiful, happy face, whereon no cloud of care had as yet rested long.

Kathleen Wilford was more difficult to describe, for the simple reason that there seemed no points

to take hold of as a start, unless it were a sensation left upon the onlooker of something incomplete, a want of definite finish. In Blanche's case a glance showed that Nature had finished her task to the last stroke, and left nothing more to be desired; in Kathleen, the first glance fell over her without taking anything away, the second awoke a vague dissatisfaction and unrest, as when one looks upon a sketch which has not been carried far enough—say one of those bits of colour puzzle or finely-drawn confusion etchings by Whistler. Yes, Mrs. Wilford looked in that second glance as if Nature had been grotesquely posturing and trying to dash off an *impression—i.e.*, playing with flesh, blood, and colour, yet producing only formless opacity instead of mystery.

Opaqueness was the general effect produced by the first and earlier after-glances.

Blue eyes, dull and faded, with a narrow space between, hair lustreless and straw-tinted, looking scant enough beside the untameable tresses of the other; a low, narrow, insignificant forehead, already marked with tiny lines, a straight enough nose,

only that the nostrils drooped too much from the point; a mouth weak and irresolute, in repose always open, the upper lip being exceedingly short, so that the upper teeth were constantly exposed. From the lower lip, moist and tremulous, the chin receded, as if sliced away, with a little hairless mole on the left side. A figure not thin, but with a suggestion of bonelessness and utter lack of vitality about it, yet sinuous and soft in its indefiniteness as a pinky-white worm.

'What an odd little creature!' murmured Bernard, as he took his second glance while stepping forward with outstretched hand. Mrs. Wilford slid into his a soft, cool, pink hand, which seemed to melt in his grasp, and yet sent a curious thrill right up to his elbow, while she looked at him for a moment from her white eyelashes with those opaque, turquoise-blue eyes. As their eyes met, the same sensation passed downwards to his heart and made it for an instant stand still, as if a light, soft finger had been laid upon it.

Mr. Wilford was a tall, upright, soldierly man, dark and rich in colouring, with a full, flowing

brown beard streaked with gray, in age about forty-five.

The introduction over, tea was served, and the two lady friends sat down together to relate their adventures since leaving school, while the doctor and Mr. Wilford spoke of indifferent topics—the weather, the last and coming races, and so forth.

Blanche spoke eagerly and questioned her friend rapidly, who replied in a listless manner and low tones—a clear, soft voice, falling upon the ear with the effect of a quiet stream. While Blanche spoke it was as if a ripple of merry music had been played; when the other replied it was as if a languid hand had trailed slowly and lightly over the keys, producing a drowsy strain without a tune.

While Bernard listened to both voices he experienced a singular depression creep over him at that gentle monotone, a dreamy desire to hear more, with a slight feeling of irritation when the merry voice interrupted.

He glanced often at the two, both well dressed—Blanche in white and her friend in silver-gray, which somehow added to her shadeless effect—and

as he looked he felt more and more satisfied with his own property and more dissatisfied with the other, wondering in his own mind how any man in his senses could have chosen such a woman to be his companion for life.

It was not indifference, but dissatisfaction, which made him look again and again; the vague unrest and desire to see what it was this figure wanted, as soon as his glance was removed, and which he failed to find out when he looked; it was the successful trick of the Impressionist.

'Well, Bernard, how do you like my friend?' asked Blanche, when the visitors had gone.

'Not much!'

'She isn't exactly what one would call pretty,' replied she; 'at least, I didn't think so when I first knew her; but she is a sweet girl, and improves so much upon acquaintance that I now think her awfully fascinating!'

'Was she always like that?'

'Like what?'

'Oh, lifeless, you know.'

'Oh yes, always quiet, but always nice, although

she can be both witty and terribly sarcastic when she likes; you don't like her now—no one does at first—but you will get to like her.'

'What I principally object to is that I cannot recall anything about her excepting her gray dress, and even that seems to be only a blur. There is nothing about her to think upon after she has gone out of sight; it feels as if, instead of a memory, someone had wiped out the place where the impressions ought to be and left only a blank, which wants filling up, and which bothers me.'

'Ah, you have said it, my clever darling; that's the charm of Kathleen. She takes herself completely away whenever she goes, and gives one no rest with the empty frame till she comes again to fill it up.'

'Get her photograph, and that will sufficiently satisfy me without the original.'

'That is what you will not get. Kathleen has one weakness—she thinks she is too ugly, and won't sit for her portrait.'

'She is not ugly.'

'No, dear, I'm glad you think not.'

'She is worse, for she is Nothing.'

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE KITCHEN.

William McTaggart would never make a good doctor, for he hadn't any of the instincts of diplomacy about him; he liked the kitchen better than anywhere else, and to smoke his well-blackened cutty pipe by its ingle-nook.

'What I miss about you is that you ain't got any refinement,' observed John Wilks.

'No, Johnny, I suppose that's it,' replied McTaggart, puffing away at his negro-head.

John Wilks was a Cornstalk of the advanced order. His occupation as page and errand-boy did not prevent him from studying Latin books as often as he had the opportunity, or quoting from them when he could; his ambition was to be a doctor, and already he had more worldly wisdom

than the uncouth Scotsman, who contented himself with correcting his wrong pronunciation and laughing at his odd mistakes.

This night they were all sitting in the kitchen after the labours of the day—the housemaid with her admirer, Barney Moore, a policeman, who *at times* protected their locality; the cook, who had fixed her hopes upon the rugged assistant; and John Wilks, the Sydney larrikin, who had importance enough for the whole company.

They had just finished supper, and Barney and McTaggart had lighted their pipes, while John sat at the table with a book on medicine in his hand.

'You must have had a strange life, Mr. McTaggart,' observed the cook; 'quite an 'ero, I'm sure. I wish you would tell us all about it.'

'Ay, ay! I have had adventures eneuch,' replied Mr. McTaggart, sucking at his pipe.

'Spin us a yarn,' cried John; 'the doctor and his chum, the count, are upstairs, so we won't be interrupted for an hour or two.'

'The count?—he seems nae end o' a swell.'

'An aristocrat he is, one of the home country's

big bugs, and an old friend of our boss—*par nobile fratrum*, as we might say.'

'Ah—ay, or *anguis in herbâ*.'

'Hold hard, old man, till I turn that up,' returned John, bending over the leaves of his lexicon; 'I'll have it in a moment.'

'Och, bother your Latin, give us the story!' broke in Barney at this moment. 'I never could stand the bothering language, except when the priest patters it, an' thin we have our faith to keep us from fainting.'

'Yes,' said the cook, 'do tell us how you came to be a doctor.'

'Weel, friends, if you will ha it, although I'd raythe speak o' something else, ye'll ha' it; it's no' very interesting, but then it's no' very lang. My father was a U.P. minister.'

'Fat's that?' remarked Barney.

'A man wha believed in the elect, and maist properly damned everybody else tae everlasting perdition.'

'And quite right too,' quoth Barney. 'If a man won't believe in the true faith and get the

blessing of the blessed Pope, then he will be damned—your hand, sor, for your father was a dacent man.'

'Ay,' responded McTaggart; 'I suppose he thought he was.'

He shook hands with the Irishman across the table, and resumed:

'Weel, as I was gaun tae tell ye, my auld man being sae sure himsel' o' heaven, wanted tae bring me up tae the same line of business, which, as my inclination didna quite fa' in wi' his desire, I used to get it gey near as het at hame as if I had been already damned and done for. Weel, ae fine morning I jist packed up my traps, and sailed awa' in search o' adventures tae America.'

'And you did have some, you bet, there,' responded John Wilks; '*ad extremum*, as I might say.'

'*Ad valorem*, Johnny, *ad valorem*. Ay, I had a few adventures in my wanderings out there, and a considerable share of hardships—that is, if occasional starvation could be considered hardship tae a man whas bonnet covered a' his family. I had

about three years o' it out there—sometimes store-keeper, sometimes tramp, until at last I grew tired o' it and thocht I'd like tae see Glasgow town ance mair. When I landed, the only job I could get was that o' a dock labourer tae keep me frae the puir-house, for I had ower-muckle pride tae gang hame tae my auld man wi' an empty purse.'

'Did you stay in the same city wid your father and never wint to see him?' interrupted Barney incredulously.

'Ay, Scotsmen can dae that sort of thing.'

'Bedad, but I couldn't; while me father had a drop of tay or a bit of bread in the house, I wouldn't have the devil's own heartlessness to keep away.'

'Weel, I did; all day lang I laboured, when I had a job in the docks, and at night, or when I was out o' work, slaved at my books as Johnny is doing now. I had made up my mind to win my degrees, and only show my face to my father when I could carry my diploma also; but it was nae licht resolve tae keep, wi' dear books to buy, examinations to prepare for, entrance fees to pay—a' out of the poor

wage o' an occasional dock labourer. But I stuck at it day and nicht till I won what I wanted. The second year I passed the examinations with good marks, and won a scholarship, and sae on, each examination bettering the last; I was never put back ance. That scholarship helped me to do the rest and fix M.D. tae my name, but until I did get it nae galley-slave had such a life. I could only afford tae eat ance a day, and had to put a stop to a' extravagancies o' beer or tobacco. I liked the pipe, but for twa lang years I never took a puff or tasted anything stronger than water.'

'You make up for it now, at any rate,' remarked the cook, who was looking ruefully on her well-cleaned stove, against which he sat, smoking and expectorating.

'Ay, I dae gey well; the last day o' the examination the prize was limited to another student an' mysel', and we had a hard tussle, but he hadna my inducement—liberty—to fecht for, and I won only by a point. We baith left the offices together, wi' our fate very uncertain. The result was to be kenned on the next day; it had been an excitin' hour

or twa, and as I left the place, wi' my rival, the houses seemed to be running a race roun'. "Have a glass of beer to our success," said my companion to me, and although I had denied mysel' for twa years, I couldna for the life o' me say nae to that offer, so we went in and had a drink together. When the young man left me, I thocht I'd tak' my first holiday these twenty-four months and see the shops; but I couldna rest: my feet drew me back to the office, in spite of myself, where my fate rested. I walked backwards and forwards two or three times afore I could mak' up my mind tae enter, but at last the nerves got the better o' me; I'm no often troubled wi' nerves, but I was that afternoon. I rung the bell at the side door and asked to see the clerk, and when I was shown in I could hardly look for shame.

'"Well, my man," he said, "what can I do for you?"

'I explained what I cam' for, that I couldna stand the suspense any langer, an' if he could only tell me the worst or the best I would be satisfied.

'"But why can't you wait till to-morrow?"

'"Because I'll no' be fit for my work, an' I canna afford tae lose a day."

'He asked me whar my business might be, and I up and tauld him, straicht off, my struggles from beginning to end, which made him open his een wi' wonder.

'"You, a dock labourer, aiming tae be a doctor! well, I never heard the like o' that!"

'"But will you tell me my chance for to-morrow?"

'"My lad, it's against our usual order to say anything—in fact, a breach of trust; yet if your story be true, and I believe you—there! I don't mind giving you a hint."

'"What?"

'"You needn't go to the dockyards to-morrow morning—come here instead."

'Lassies, being only women, ye canna be expected to understan' the excitement o' a man's ambition, or the workings o' it; but if you can think how ye would feel if ye had been angling wi' a' your micht tae catch a man for twa lang years, an' a' at ance got the offer o' marriage when ye least expected it,

ye may understan' a little of what I felt when the clerk gave me that quiet hint o' my guid fortune.'

'The idea of a woman doing such a thing for any man!' said both the cook and the housemaid in one breath, tossing their heads with indignation at the vile comparison.

'Nae offence; I only wanted to bring my state of feelings at the time mair forcibly hame tae ye. That nicht I wanted nae whisky to mak' me feel drunk, I was that already with exultation; but I wanted a pipe tae steady my nerves, so wi' my last saxpence I boucht a clay pipe and twapence o' twist and enjoyed a nicht of perfect bliss.'

'I lay you were doing all this for some young woman,' observed Barney Moore.

'No, Barney; I did it so that my father might have no cause to be ashamed o' his scapegrace son.'

William McTaggart looked on the stove with his filmy dull eyes, in which there was little or no expression, and silently sucked at his well-blackened short clay pipe, while the cook, not yet recovered

from her huff at his clumsy comparison, turned sulkily to attend to a saucepan.

'What is that you're making the nicht sae late, Betsy lass?' inquired he, as his eye landed upon the pan.

'Some gruel for the missus.'

'Ah—ay, an' how is she the nicht?'

'Easier, I think; but it's about time she was having this now.'

The cook turned to her cupboard and produced a phial, which she was uncorking over the pan when the assistant caught her by the arm.

'That's her medicine, I suppose?'

'Yes, it has to go into the gruel.'

'Made up by the doctor, eh?'

'Of course, you stupid; he wasn't going to let you do it when it was for his wife.'

'Of course not, Betsy; he is too much in love wi' her to trust that to a clumsy hand like mine. However, let's see it.'

William took the phial gently from her hand, and carried it over to the lamp, smelling it first and afterwards tasting it.

'Verra guid medicine,' he observed, turning round with his back to the company for an instant and making a rapid movement with his hands in the direction of his breast-pocket, which was unobserved by the company. 'Verra guid medicine indeed; he is a clever fellow, our doctor;' and he handed the open phial once more to Betsy the cook.

'He has style, my old boy, style, what you want —*idoneus homo*, you know,' retorted the boy John with his hand on his lexicon.

'Ay, Johnnie, deed ay!—*ad captandum vulgus*,' replied McTaggart, getting up from his seat and shambling out of the back door.

CHAPTER V.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

While John Wilks was airing his Latin scraps of quotations in the kitchen, Dr. Bernard St. Vincent and his friend Count Victor Linski sat discussing wine and cigars in the study.

It was a week after the scenes described in the opening chapter, and the count was the same visitor who had come disguised as an old man. To-night, as he sat with his legs spread out in the comfortably furnished study, he was resplendent as to get-up and externals. The doctor was flushed, for he had been drinking rather heavily.

'Now, old man,' observed the count, taking the decanter from the hand of his friend and host, 'no more wine for the present. We have delicate work before us to-night, and I don't want any bungling,

as you are sure to do, or worse, if you get your old blood fever on you.'

'Don't be afraid, my dear count; I won't drink too much.'

'I'll take care of that, my friend. You are an awful fool, Dick, else you might have done without my help. By Jove! had I only half your chances you wouldn't catch me chucking them away like you. Only fancy, a glorious woman, a large practice, a father-in-law to *die so pat*, and a nice round sum of five thousand pounds, all to be made ducks and drakes of in a month or two! Ah, doctor, doctor! for the tiger that you are when your blood is up you are about the biggest jackass that I know.'

'No more than you have been, Jack.'

'Me, man! when did Fortune ever make luck for me? I have had it all to plan out, and watch every thread closely while it is spinning so that no mesh may slip. I am successful, yes, yet not through good luck, but rather through downright talent, endless pluck, and hard work. Had I once a chance in my life as you have had for the last six

months, do you think I'd have played with it as you have done?'

'Yes, my boy, you would have done the same exactly; in fact, you are doing the same now. What about Miss Burns, the rich squatter's daughter, who would marry you to-morrow if your other flame of four days, Mrs. Skittles, would allow it?'

'Ah, my boy, there you have hit it. Do you think I can wait here long enough to be able to square matters with Mary Burns' father, whether Mrs. Skittles was on the ground or not? No, I am a hawk on the wing; I can only take my pleasure flying. I have only eight or ten weeks to reap my harvest before the gaff is blown, but with you——'

'Oh, confound it, don't moralize on what I might have been. If I hadn't spent that five thousand pounds before you discovered me, I should have had to give it up to you.'

'Only a fair share, doctor—only a fair share.'

'Oh yes, I know what that means. No, no, we both belong to an evanescent species, so we must take what we can out of life.'

'I suppose so,' admitted Count Victor Linski, as he lit a fresh cigar; 'we have our hour of existence. But what about that new fancy of yours, Mrs. Wilford? Surely you cannot compare her in any way to your own beautiful wife?'

'That's my own affair, Jack; you leave it alone!'

'Oh, don't bite my nose off! If you like that sort of thing in preference to perfection, I may wonder, but, as you say, I have no business. I suppose there is money in the affair, eh?'

'No!'

'Well, you do surprise me; I begin to think Madame Fortune must be getting tired of her *protégé*, after all. How is your--your wife to-night?'

'No better.'

'Ah! I say, doctor, you are looking after her yourself, of course.'

'Of course. Why?'

'Nothing, nothing, and I don't want to ask any more questions. Poor young girl!' muttered the count to himself, vigorously puffing out some

clouds of smoke. 'What a beast he is, to be sure! —so pretty, so pretty, and so trusting!'

Ten o'clock at this moment chimed out from the ebony timepiece on the chimney-shelf; as the last stroke fell with a silvery sound, both gentlemen started.

'Hullo!' said the count; 'time we started. Have you got everything?'

'Yes,' replied the doctor, getting up and stretching himself.

'The medicine all right and handy?'

'All right.'

'Then let us be off.'

'Hold hard a moment, till I see if Blanche is asleep.'

The doctor left the study for a moment, and as the count looked after him a decided look of disgust settled upon his fair face.

'I don't know any man out of gaol whom I wouldn't sooner chum with than with my friend—heartless, mean, cowardly, and bloodthirsty. There are lions, tigers, and snakes amongst men and women, but he is a decided jackal, and, if I mistake

not, this she-snake will smother him before they are done with each other.'

Count Linski had closely-cropped fair hair, a twisted nose (as if it had been broken and pushed on one side by some former fight), crow-like blue eyes, and a beautiful set of strong, even teeth, which redeemed an otherwise commonplace countenance; a pleasant-looking young man, with a lithe, slender figure, strong, sinewy hands, and long fingers.

'Are you ready?' The doctor entered as he spoke.

'Quite, old man.'

'Then let us go.'

The two men went out of the study, the doctor turning the lamp low before he left; they both trod lightly as they passed down the stairs, taking their overcoats and hats from the pegs in the hall, and closing the street-door very gently as they passed out.

As they went along the dimly-lighted street, another figure left the shadow of the houses and made after them at about two blocks distant—a

tall figure, with his hat drawn over his eyes and a short black cutty pipe in his mouth.

The two friends did not walk with any particular caution after they had left the house; the night was balmy and clear, although dark, and they both enjoyed their cigars as they strolled along the quiet street towards the main thoroughfare, along which the 'busses and cabs plied between Sydney and Bondi; they turned up towards Double Bay, and, after walking for a little way, went together into the private bar of a well-known hotel, where they called for brandy-and-soda, and spoke across the counter to the barmaid and landlord.

'You made a pot of money by Black Swan, they tell me, doctor,' observed the landlord.

'I did not do badly that time.'

'It did surprise us to see her coming in.'

'I was a bit astonished myself, and of course delighted.'

'Must be going—tender appointment, you know. Good-night,' observed the count, looking at his watch and finishing his drink at a gulp.

'Good-night, old chap; take care of yourself. I won't be long myself in getting home.'

The friends shook hands and separated.

'Ain't that the count who have just come out?' asked the landlord of the doctor, who stayed on a moment behind.

'Yes.'

'A smart gent, no end of a toff, and a devil amongst the women.'

'He is a bit of a Don Juan.'

'Oh, they'll go mad over him in Sydney, the girls will; it's so uncommon rare to have a real live count out here. He'll be making a rich match if he likes.'

'Oh, he doesn't care for money; he has plenty—at home.'

'So they tell me,' remarked the landlord. 'Lost his luggage coming from New Zealand, when the *Mother Cary* went down. I heard of the wreck, and how as they had a lord o' some sort on board. It's a friend of mine who makes his clothes, and anyone can see he is a real aristocrat from the stock he orders, all put down against the time his remittance comes to hand.'

'Your tailor-friend is in a fair way to make his fortune if he does well by the count, for he is so particular and fashionable.'

'So Brown says.'

'But I must be getting home again, as Mrs. St. Vincent isn't well. Good-night.'

'Good-night, sir. Sorry to hear about Mrs. St. Vincent; hope it ain't anythink serious?'

'Nothing to be alarmed about at present, but we have to be careful, as her heart is weak in its action.'

'As nice a gentleman as comes to my 'ouse,' observed the landlord, as he turned to address some other customer, while the doctor turned from the bar and passed through the folding doors.

He walked smartly towards Wooloomooloo, along by Paddington main street, but at the first side turn he paused to light a fresh cigar, and, with a quick glance up and down the thoroughfare, struck, as if with a purpose, into the by-lane, quickening his steps as he got farther from the light, and more under the drooping branches and dewy leaves hanging over the garden walls.

CHAPTER VI.

ROMANCE.

Amelia Skittles was a widow who had reached the mellow age of forty-five. She was fully developed, somewhat inclined towards fulness of habit, as she coyly admitted to her dressmaker, but could stand a deal of bracing in without giving way to panting; short in stature, with large black eyes of the languishing order, a little florid in the complexion, and as romantic in her ideas as if she were a maiden of fifteen.

She longed, and had done so all her life, to be carried off by a corsair, or become the bride of a bandit. Skittles had made and left her plenty of money, of course, but he had done nothing romantic in the whole course of his matrimonial career; he had piled the sovereigns one on the top

of the other in the most methodical manner, living an honest, commonplace existence, and passing away in the same unexciting manner, ending it up with merely a fit of apoplexy, and leaving his widow with an unsatisfied soul in the midst of unlimited luxury.

'He never read even Byron,' she would tell her friends, 'and did not know who Don Juan was. He asked me once if he wasn't still alive.'

They say that the ideal lives for every man or woman, if they can only meet it. Mrs. Skittles had languished for eight long years without finding hers, reading 'The Sorrows of Werther,' and such-like masterpieces of the sentimental school, and dreaming a wild impassioned dream of wishes, with the flood-gates of her emotions stemmed and dyked up amongst her uncongenial surroundings, waiting for a touch from the right fairy wand for the whole bulwarks to crumble down, and the sleeping, pent-up lake of her emotions to rush out and become a raging torrent.

This is how Mrs. Amelia had expressed her inner state for the past eight long weary years, when her

cherished ideal, realized in the jaunty person of Count Victor Linski, came fluttering to her arms like a tame canary, after she had almost given up all her fond hopes.

They met for the first time at a garden-party, and the young count, with that fine eye for game which a true sportsman always possesses, became her graceful adorer within half an hour of his introduction, touched with unerring aim the weak spot of the lake barriers, and let out the long-curbed flood of her affections with an overpowering rush.

The wealthy widow loved her young adventurer madly—boundlessly.

'You are a wicked man, I know,' she told him after she had spoken awhile with him.

The count admitted that he was rather inclined to that weakness.

'And a perfect Don Juan, I feel sure; in fact, you are an awful fellow.'

He owned that he had been a trifle gay in the past.

Enough, her hero had at last turned up—good-

looking, fast-living, perhaps just sufficiently wicked and *blasé* to fulfil her romantic demands. Ah, ecstasy ! at last she could begin to love.

During the three days of her halcyon love-dream the count had flavoured her life with what she mostly craved after, excitement ; he could provide that kind of entertainment, if nothing else.

He had manfully told her the state of his exchequer before they parted on that first interview ; how he had lost all by the wreck of the vessel in which he was, and only saved his own precious person by a miracle. Proud—ah, yes, he came from a wonderfully proud family ; still, he would not wound her by refusing her generous offer of the use of her purse until such time as his own remittances arrived from home.

'I would be loved as Juliet was loved,' sighed the plump widow, and the count promised to do the Romeo business to perfection.

They had met three times in the dewy night with only the stars to witness their fond, fond vows. He had also told her, as they grew more to one another, much of his past life and princely relations

in Poland, and although he did not say so in actual words, yet by many unconscious but intensely artistic touches as he related his past, she felt what a noble hero he had been in moments of great danger, even if a little incontinent in his amorous passages.

'I knew not what love was then—the burning, soul-engrossing, heart-filling passion,' whispered he amongst the lemon and lime trees; and she believed him, and rewarded him by leaning her soft, full, round, flushing face against his fashionable vest.

'We must keep our love a profound secret,' she had said. 'Swear to me by all you hold sacred to guard it as a precious secret and conceal it from all eyes until I give you permission to reveal it.'

And the count vowed by all that *he* held sacred that he would not breathe a word or show a sign by day, or before envious eyes, of the passion which now consumed his vitals.

'I want you even to do a little intriguing diplomacy and feigning, so that all suspicion may

depart from us—pretend to love some other woman.'

The count said he would try; and so he did the very next day, and, as the fair widow thought, succeeded wonderfully well.

'He does it to perfection, only I wish he wouldn't feign with such a pretty girl as Mary Burns.'

Of course the widow exchanged confidences with her noble Romeo and told him how her money was placed. These prosaic details he waved aside as beneath love like theirs. He was also very firm in his resolution to take no more than he strictly required until his remittance came from home.

'My Victor is too modest,' she said to herself, with a thrill of pride; 'but I must show him my affection in some way, and since he will not take money I must make it up.'

The result of the making up was that Count Victor had a splendid watch, the best which money could purchase in Sydney, to time his nightly engagements by, with some other trifles in the

form of jewelry to deck his jaunty figure and long fingers.

Three nights they had met in secret, and this was the fourth assignation towards which he was hastening after he had left the doctor.

On the night previous, before they parted, she had confided to his unwilling ears that she had drawn a large sum from the bank, and, with her quarterly allowance due that day, she was ready for an early elopement to Melbourne if he felt inclined.

She wanted an elopement, although, having no relations to object to her marriage, there was no reason why she should specially desire this road to the consummation of her wishes; but it was her idea, and the count, like all infatuated lovers, thought it very good.

'How late you are, my love!' murmured the amorous one, as she stood at the side garden-gate (the servants' entrance) and received his chaste but passionate kiss upon her full ruby lips.

'My love, my life!' exclaimed the count, as he threw his arms about her, hiding her face

upon his manly breast while he drew her into the shelter of the trees, leaving the gate for a moment open.

As the sensitive creature trembled in his arms, a shadow slid past the open gate and melted within the blackness of the trees, after which the count released her, saying:

'Had we not better shut the gate, in case a policeman comes along?'

'Right, love, as you are always,' said Mrs. Skittles, as she shut and locked the gate.

'Is there no danger of the servants being about?'

'No. I make a strict rule that they must all be in bed by ten o'clock, and the lights out by half-past ten; it is now five minutes to eleven.'

'You know, my Amelia, that I fear nothing, except spiteful tongues. I would that thou wert poor, so that I might prove my devotion.'

'So you shall, my Victor. I have in the house just now fifteen hundred pounds.'

'No more?'

The tone was one of pure vexation.

'Victor!'

'I mean, so much. What can we require all that for, if we are only away for a month?'

'Ah, you foolish boy! Melbourne is an expensive place, and I want to enjoy myself when we are together.'

'Well, dearest love, I will trust it all to you.'

'Now, I want you to prove your devotion to-night.'

'In what way, my charmer?'

'I'd like you to take charge of this fifteen hundred pounds for me, and bring it with you to the station to-morrow when we meet.'

'No, my beloved, I will not take this money. If you like to bring it, good and well; but it is yourself I want, not your money.'

'My princely Victor, I did but try you; now I know that you are my very own.'

'And about this paltry money?'

'I shall bring it with me to-morrow morning.'

The fond pair talked a little longer, arranging their plans for this romantic escapade, and then, after a fond embrace at the gate, they parted.

'Dear fellow!' she sighed; 'and to think I had the hard-heartedness to try him at all; but he is real good gold.'

She shut the gate and went into the house satisfied with him and herself—mostly with herself.

CHAPTER VII.

REALISM.

'Only fifteen hundred! however, that is better than nothing, and as it is in gold it is easily carried.'

So muttered the count to himself, as he strode for a couple of hundred yards along the roadway; then, stopping, he glanced round him warily, and quietly stole back to the gate.

Mrs. Skittles lived at Double Bay, and within sight of the harbour. Where the count now waited he could hear the lapping of the little wavelets against the beach, with the night air from the ocean sighing amongst the banana and other trees inside the garden-wall—a high wall it was, and well protected on the top with pieces of broken glass.

Meantime the enamoured lady, now that the object of her adoration had departed, turned back to go into the house with a slight shiver; for in spite of her love, ardent enough for nineteen, she was forty-five, and felt that at that age one is not quite impervious to chill night airs and heavy dews.

She had left her lamp burning low in her bedroom and the French window a little ajar, so that she had only to tread as softly as her solid bulk would allow her along the veranda, the rest of the household being asleep and the house secured.

All was still as she crept into her room and fastened the door behind her.

'After to-morrow I shall be my lady the Countess Linski.' She had thrown aside her black lace shawl, and now stood surveying the reflection of her short and comfortable person with a complacent eye in the large cheval-glass beside her dressing-table. 'Sweet thought! sweet thought! Ah me!' The countess-to-be gave a little sleepy yawn and again a slight shiver. 'What a cold night it is, to be sure!'

Drawing the curtain closely over the window, and making things generally comfortable for the night (as middle-aged people, male or female, will do, whether in or out of love), she struck a vesta and applied it to a tiny silver spirit-lamp, which stood on the table surmounted by an urn for heating water, after which she passed over to a chiffonier in one corner of her richly-furnished apartment, and, taking from it a cut-glass decanter, solid and squat as she was herself, with a tumbler, sugar basin, and plate of sliced-up lemon, carried them over to the table, and, drawing up an easy-chair, prepared to indulge in a reverie.

The room was not furnished in the æsthetic fashion one might expect from such a sentimental nature, but it was better—it had been done with an eye to comfort and cosiness. A soft down French bed, with snowy-white mosquito-curtains well drawn round, although there were not many of the insects about to-night; the floor covered with Persian and Turkey rugs, and the chairs softly stuffed and covered with a rich pattern wrought in silk; over against the wall, and opposite the

chiffonier, a large wardrobe, which, where she now sat, was placed directly behind her.

The steam was now coming out of the urn, so the widow, reaching forward, deliberately poured a little into her tumbler to warm it, and after rinsing it round, emptied it into the basin, which she could reach without rising, then, putting in two lumps of sugar and a third of the tumbler of water, she watched it in a dreamy way as it slowly melted.

Although given to day-dreams and aspirations, there was a deliberation and completeness in her preparation of her nightcap which proved that Mrs. Skittles had not been in the habit of sacrificing the bodily wants for the soul's longings. From the well-filled decanter she now poured rather more than another third of the spirits into the hot water, and on the top of that again about a fifth of boiling water, and with her plump little fingers taking up a tiny rind of the sliced lemon, she completed the decoction in a scientific manner highly creditable either to maid, wife, or widow.

A rich aroma of Scotch whisky and lemon floated through the room as the widow set down the tumbler, after taking her first long sip.

'Ah, Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?' she gently murmured, heaving a full-breasted, spirit-laden sigh as she stirred softly with her silver spoon the fragrant decoction, and gazed in a languishing way towards the far-away corner of the bedroom.

Meantime the door of the wardrobe was noiselessly pushed aside, and the head of a man appeared watching her—a face hidden by a black piece of crape.

'To-morrow; ah, to-morrow!' once more she sighed, and lifted the tumbler to her rosy lips.

The figure steals from the wardrobe, bootless, and holding a white handkerchief in its hand all crumpled up.

'Methinks will it ever come, this long to-morrow.'

The hand is stealing absently once more towards the steaming tumbler, when the burglar is upon her—one clutch from behind at her back hair, and

before she can cry out the handkerchief is pressed firmly over her mouth and nostrils.

Mrs. Skittles did not offer much resistance. The outstretched hand, which had been feeling for the tumbler, clawed the air instead for a moment, and then dropped limply down by her side; the next moment she was insensibly leaning back and filling up the softly-cushioned armchair.

This done, the robber turned low the lamp again, and, opening the French window behind him softly, shut it as quietly when he went out.

A few moments of dead silence in that darkened room, with the inert figure of the plump widow filling up the armchair, the white handkerchief still on her face, and the steam still floating from the half-emptied tumbler, while the water in the urn of the spirit-lamp sang a merry song as it boiled away.

Then the French window was once more pushed open, carefully shut, and the curtains drawn, and when the lamp was again turned up two men stood in the room with crape masks upon their faces.

'Ah! so this is the way Juliet regales herself,

after Romeo has departed,' observed one of them, taking up the still warm tumbler, and emptying it at a draught. 'By Jove! the old lady can brew a good glass of grog.'

'Make haste, and don't moon there; the chloroform won't last long.'

'All right, old man; here goes.'

The first robber, who had dosed the woman, stood over her in case she should revive, while the other moved deftly about the room, opening drawers and tossing things carelessly about.

'Here are the dimes' (bringing forward a heavy bag) 'and her trinkets; now I'll just prospect about the house for a short time and see if there is anything else worth lifting before we take our hook. I'll be back in a jiffy.'

He slid out of the bedroom-door as he spoke and disappeared.

One, two, three minutes passed, the watcher listening with all his attention, when from below he suddenly heard a loud scream in a woman's voice, and next moment the bedroom-door burst open and the other appeared.

'Dowse the glim, mate, quick! the house is alarmed!'

The watcher blew the lamp out, in his haste overturning the boiling urn and spirit lamp, and then both men plunged for the door, while Mrs. Skittles, getting some of the scalding drops upon her hand, started up with a loud shriek.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHARM OF THE SNAKE.

A DOCTOR can never call an hour his own; so it was on this night. Dr. Bernard St. Vincent was sitting in his study taking his last cigar before going to bed, when a hasty ring at the door made him jump up in a hurry and proceed to open it.

'Quick, doctor!' said Bridget, Mrs. Skittles' housemaid; 'missus has been robbed and nearly murdered, and you are wanted at once.'

'Robbed and nearly murdered?'

'Yes, doctor, and you must come at once.'

'Very well, my girl; I'll just get my hat and be with you.'

When the doctor got to Double Bay he found the place in a state of wild confusion, the police

inspector there questioning the servants, and all the lamps flaring.

Mrs. Skittles was in a terrible state of 'nerves,' but unable to tell anything about the matter. She had been sitting deep in thought before going to bed, when she suddenly felt herself gripped from behind, and in an instant the whole went blank; she had seen nothing.

'Ah!' said the doctor, smelling her breath, 'you have been chloroformed.'

After getting her to bed and prescribing a soothing draught, the doctor took his departure and went home to bed.

Early next morning the count called upon him, having heard about the affair, and had a long talk with his friend. Blanche that morning had risen to breakfast, although very weak, and was present when he entered.

'Good-morning, madame; I trust you are some better.'

'A little better, thank you, count,' replied Blanche, giving him the tips of her fingers very coldly and rising to leave the room. The irre-

sistible count was not so great a favourite with Blanche as he was with most ladies.

The count gallantly bowed her out of the room, and then turned abruptly to the doctor, drawing him over towards the window, and for a few moments they held a very animated conversation together, after which he turned to take his departure.

'Where are you going to now?' asked Dr. Bernard St. Vincent.

'To call on the widow and hear the news; I must be prepared for all emergencies.'

'And about our little business?'

'That's all right, doctor; don't be afraid; we can meet to-night in my diggings and settle all that.'

As he left the study he almost ran into the arms of William McTaggart, who was coming in.

'I beg your pardon, sir,' said William clumsily, as he moved aside to let him pass.

'Well, McTaggart, what is it?'

'Nothing much, sir, only I found this handkerchief as I was going down for my morning dook

early this morning, an' I thoucht from the initials that it micht be yours, as it is marked with your initials.'

'Let me see it—ah! yes, it is mine. Where did you find it?' asked the doctor eagerly, making a clutch at it and examining it closely.

'On the road tae Double Bay, close by Mrs. Skittles' house.'

'Oh yes, I must have dropped it when I was leaving her this morning. You have heard the news, of course?'

'About the robbery, ay. How is the puir leddy?'

'Only a little bit flustered; she'll be all right in a day.'

'That is guid. The robbers chloroformed her, did they not?' observed McTaggart, glancing at the handkerchief.

'I suspect that is how they managed the job.'

'Good-morning, mum; I hope you are some better.'

William turned his dull eyes upon Blanche as she again entered.

'Yes,' shortly retorted Blanche stiffly, as he made his clumsy bow and went out.

'That is all right,' muttered Dr. Bernard, as he crammed the handkerchief into his pocket, after holding it up to his face for a moment.

'What is, dear?' asked his wife, coming forward.

'Hullo, Blanche! what do you want?' he asked fiercely and suspiciously, as he turned upon her.

'Nothing, dear Bernard; I was only thinking how tired you must be without rest all last night.'

'What do you mean?'

'You were out, you know, all last night.'

'Not all night; I was here until about one o'clock.'

'Here, Bernard? Why, I was down myself from half-past ten till after twelve.'

'What! you have been watching me, then!' and he took a rapid step forward and clutched her savagely by the wrist.

'Oh, Bernard, you are unkind, and you are hurting me!'

'I forgot tae tell ye about Mr. Young's front teeth——' William McTaggart popped his head at

this moment within the door, with his usual lack of ceremony.

'Yes, yes; I will see you in a moment. There—there, Blanche, go away and leave me. I am tired this morning, and irritable, but not unkind. Leave me, like a dear, and forgive me. I did not mean to hurt you.'

Blanche walked stiffly to the door, while the doctor watched her back as she was disappearing.

'Curious! she is really better this morning,' muttered the doctor; then aloud, 'I say, Blanche!'

'Yes, dear.'

'Did you take your medicine last night?'

'Yes, and feel ever so much stronger, thanks to all your care for me, you cross old bear.'

'That's a good thing. Don't neglect it, even although you feel better.'

'Of course not; what you prescribe I'll always take, Bernard.' She came over to him impulsively.

'Well!'

'I'll forgive you—there!'

She snatched a kiss, and ran out quickly to hide

her tears. Blanche had been out of sorts for the past two days, and was nervous in consequence.

It was an uncommonly busy day with the doctor. One patient came in after another, so that it was close upon lunch-time when John Wilks announced the last one, the hours of consultation being then past.

'John, you can go down to dinner, and don't trouble the door any longer to-day; I won't see any more patients.—How do you do, Mrs. Wilford?'

It was Kathleen Wilford who came in and now sat down on the well-worn consulting chair.

'I am all right myself, but I came to see you about my husband.'

'Yes, *dear*.'

The doctor had fallen into the habit of the same freedom that his wife used towards her friend. Although only a week had passed since their introduction, as she spent nearly every day some hours beside his wife, they had each lost all formality.

While the doctor came nearer her to address her, she glanced up into his eyes, as she always did, with

that tokenless gaze, and he grew strangely troubled and nervous.

Kathleen had taken off her glove from her right hand, and now laid it softly upon his while she was speaking in that peculiar, unmusical, but sweet monotone.

'No, he is not as I should like him to be, and he will not see a doctor; he always says that he dislikes the whole fraternity.'

'Then I must see him by accident and judge what is the matter.'

'Ah, do; I shall be so much obliged, so very much obliged.'

As she repeats the phrase the hand resting upon his gently presses it, and at the touch an electric shock seems to pass through him, leaving him thrilled but languid.

Neither speaks for a moment, and the air grows hot and heavy for the doctor. What is it she has about her, in spite of all her want of womanly attraction, which awakens such discontent and such desire?

His mouth becomes dry and choking, and his

knees are trembling. He tries to picture her as she sits before him, but he can fix upon nothing definite; it is like desiring a dissolving and formless cloud.

At last he rouses himself with a start; she had withdrawn her hand and was sheathing it in her glove preparatory to going.

'You will stay and see—Blanche?'

'If *you* wish it.'

Did he wish it or her any more? As he cast down his eyes and tried to think it out she came closer to him, holding out her gloved hand as if to say good-bye.

'Yes, Kathleen, I want you to stay.'

At the touch of her gloved hand, from which no thrill came, he looked up and met her opaque glance, and the invitation leapt from his dry lips impulsively and huskily.

'Very well, Bernard, I'll stay to luncheon, and you will see my husband and give me your advice afterwards.'

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER LUNCHEON.

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent felt strangely weak and languid as he went upstairs to wash his hands before luncheon, while Blanche and her friend were together.

What occult power had this woman—if she was a woman—over him in particular, for he had asked both Blanche and the count, and neither had felt as he did when near her. In Blanche's case it was merely the half-pitying friendship which one beautiful woman might feel towards another of her own sex not so richly endowed, and towards whom it was not possible to feel jealousy; she was for ever urging him to be attentive and kind to her poor dear friend.

With the gay count, who, as he confessed, lived

only for his hour of sunshine, she was literally nothing either one way or another. He spoke to her cheerfully if she came in his way, but left her carelessly whenever he could do so for metal more attractive.

The amorous widow amused him with her sentiment and helped him with her purse, so that he liked her immensely, and could meet all her advances without being in the least degree bored; for, as he said, his past experience in Western Australia had taught him both great patience and to be content with almost anything. 'She is a thousand times better than breaking stones and swallowing skilly.' This, of course, *entre nous* to his friend.

With Mary Burns, the squatter's daughter, he knew that he hadn't the ghost of a chance of the affair lasting or coming to a serious climax; so he took as much of it as he could get in the time left to him to enjoy it, committing himself to love-promises as she wished, without for one instant allowing his mind to be diverted from the main object of his life—*i.e.*, to get as much out of

every one of his transitory friends as he could in the way of swindling and borrowing.

Lively, gay, and easy, he borrowed from everyone he met—until his remittances should come to hand; and it was wonderful how many bank-books he had at his command, each friend keeping the transactions to himself, and feeling flattered and honoured to be able to oblige this dazzling young nobleman.

Of course, he knew that he was waltzing on the top of a mine which might be sprung at any moment; but that was a chronic state with him, and he hoped to be able to vanish in good time with his loot before an indiscreet word should start the universal discovery of how completely he had fleeced everybody.

He wasn't known officially at Government House, and he didn't want to be just yet; but he was on talking and borrowing terms with most of the fellows who frequented the best clubs. He hadn't yet put up his name at any of the clubs, for, as he explained when asked to do so, he was only waiting for his letter from home to establish himself

properly; but the Governor recognised him when they met, and a royal prince, then visiting the colonies, had laughed at one of his witty stories at a public dinner when he sat near to royalty, and, indeed, had invited him in a general way to come aboard his ship—which vague invitation he had adroitly let all his acquaintance hear about as a common experience, so that no one doubted his assumption of nobility, or considered him otherwise than as a welcome and honoured visitor to their beautiful city.

It is astonishing how very easy it is to impose upon people, if the impostor can only carry it off with wit and style.

'That *Thing* will ruin you as thoroughly as ever man was ruined, depend upon it, Dick,' he had said more than once to his friend. 'I don't know how or why *It* can, with such a face and figure—but *It* will.'

'I am pretty well ruined already,' responded the doctor moodily.

'And *It* will finish the job completely; however, if a fellow has to go to the devil, there's

no use going sulky, so laugh, as I do, while you run.'

He always referred to Kathleen Wilford as the *Thing* or *It*.

Did she exercise the same demoralizing influence upon her husband? This the doctor meant to find out that afternoon, and as he thought upon Mr. Wilford, the man who owned this creature, a wave of brutal hatred swept over him, waking up all the savage cravings for murder which sometimes possessed him. In his mind's eye he saw the man, palpable enough, strongly built and swarthy, and beside him an impalpable vision of lustreless fair hair and pinky flesh, which made him quiver with impotent desire.

Was it love, or hatred, or unutterable passion which moved him in these debilitating gusts towards this object? He could not answer the mental question; he only felt when near her that his manhood went from him, that she seemed to quench his vitality, yet awake unknown cravings, and that his murder instincts were the only active feelings left dominant — these and the wish that she, or, as

the count put it, *It*, could be isolated from all surroundings and exist only for himself.

He was in desperate circumstances, for the money which, through the death of her father, his wife had brought to him, was all gone ; the winnings of the horse race had only given him enough to stave off the present debts, but there were others looming up. His practice was good enough still, although not so good as he had found it ; but doctors cannot call in their accounts, as tradesmen might do, if they mean to keep up their social position.

His own and Blanche's lives were insured for heavy sums in different companies, and by her death he could command enough to take him away. No thought of the fair young girl who idolized him, and had given up her life to him, troubled his mean, cowardly heart, as he reasoned out this conclusion ; he had reasoned it out all so calmly and callously before Kathleen Wilford appeared on the scene, and had made up his mind that Blanche must be doomed, as others had been before her, to minister to his advantage.

She was pretty, young, and tender—so is the

lamb that the dingo carries off and devours; she was his wife—ah! perhaps the wolf or dingo won't go quite the length of humanity in the way of atrocity.

He brushed himself up as he made these reflections, or, rather, thought out the gist of them, but in a much more flattering way to himself, and then went down to rejoin the ladies.

Kathleen was sitting at the piano, listlessly passing over the keys with her soft fingers, and producing faint rippling waves of sound, as he entered, while Blanche stooped over a flower-pot at the window, plucking off some dead leaves. The doctor, used as he was to music—for Blanche was a splendid musician—caught his breath as he heard this low, monotonous sound, something like the drone which the snake-charmer uses to charm his cobras, and a dazed feeling gathered in his brain, which for a moment made him hold by the handle of the door.

'Come along, Bernard; we have been waiting for you.'

Blanche was not in good spirits during luncheon,

and excused herself from accompanying her friend and husband in their afternoon visit to Mr. Wilford.

'I don't feel very well this afternoon, and think I'll just take a book and lie down.'

'You have not taken your medicine to-day, have you?' asked the doctor anxiously.

'Yes; but I don't feel any better since taking it.'

'Then I must give you a change. I'll go down and make it up now.'

He left the room and went down to his laboratory, where William McTaggart sat working at his teeth-moulds, and John was washing out phials and bottles.

McTaggart only nodded from his bench, and continued his work, while the doctor, taking down one or two decanters, made up the medicine.

'There, Wilks, shake that well up, and, when it's thoroughly dissolved, take it upstairs to Mrs. St. Vincent.'

'Yes, sir.'

John began vigorously shaking up the mixture as the doctor left them.

'Ca canny, ca canny wi' that phial, Johnny, or you'll spoil the medicine. See, this is the way to do it.'

McTaggart took the phial from the boy's hand and began to move it up and down gently.

'*Medio tutissimus ibis*, eh, old boy?' replied the irrepressible.

'Ay, Johnny, *secundum artem*. Now, my bold scientist and Latin scholar, if you will gang tae the kitchen and get me a basin o' hot water, I'll shake the mixture till you come back.'

'All right, skipper;' and John, ever willing, took the bowl for heating the guttapercha and went out.

'The damned scoundrel! so he is getting impatient for his victim, is he?' observed the assistant to himself, as he carefully looked at the dissolving crystals in the phial. 'I suppose I'll have to make the poor lass a bit ill or he'll be suspecting, so here goes for a mild emetic. It will not do her much harm, and the symptoms are very similar.'

He emptied the mixture into another bottle be-

side him, then, swiftly moving about, he rinsed the phial out clean, and filled it again with a decoction of his own making up.

'She's had two doses before, and one this morning while I was out. She'll be all the better of this; but if I could only hit upon some plan to warn her of her danger!' He laid the phial down on his bench, and, lifting up his pipe, lit it with a meditative air. 'An anonymous letter—no, no, that will not do; she would show it him and put him on his guard, and he would succeed some other way. I must think on another method of saving her effectually without alarming her.'

As he clutched absently at his beard and puffed his pipe, he looked a different man. The dull eyes grew bright and grave-looking, and the features more refined, with that stern purpose which stamped them and drew the massive brows together.

Meantime the doctor and Mrs. Wilford were being driven in his machine along George Street towards her hotel.

'Blanche does not look well to-day.'

'She is not well; in fact, she is far from well, although she will scarcely believe it.'

'Ah!'

He feels her eyes are upon him, but keeps his own resolutely away, and it is only when they arrive and he gives her his hand to help her out that he meets her gaze, which transfixes him, as it always does, so that he feels no longer master of himself.

'My friend,' she murmured, releasing him, 'you will help me also with my husband.'

Kathleen Wilford did not speak much, and what she said beyond replies or monosyllables was of little seeming consequence, and yet to his imagination, distorted by that lack-lustre look, it seemed as if she had whispered, 'Help me also to kill my husband.'

She did not appear to need a reply, but glided before him up the hotel steps and into the private apartments, where her husband sat writing some letters.

They were not a very demonstrative couple with one another, although Gilbert Wilford was a

hearty-looking man. He had made his money at the gold-diggings, after a former experience in the army, was stalwart and young-looking for his years, and seemingly not troubled with nerves.

Kathleen went over to a seat at the table while the two gentlemen shook hands together.

'Don't disguise why you are here, doctor; you have come to study my case.'

The doctor was a trifle taken aback, and muttered some commonplace.

'That is so,' bluffly interrupted Mr. Wilford. 'Kathleen there will make herself needlessly anxious on my account. The fact is, I have had a busy, hard-working life, and idleness is not suiting me at this late hour. I must have something to do to occupy lagging time.'

Clearly the husband of Kathleen had no more sensitiveness than the others as far as she was concerned.

'Have a nobbler, my boy, and after that, if you have nothing better to do, take my little wife over to see the gardens this afternoon, and come back here to tea. I have these letters to answer in

time to catch the mail, which closes at four o'clock. I don't want any medicine to cure me, only hard work.'

'I don't think you do,' said the doctor, laughing lightly, yet with hatred in his heart at this bluff, open-hearted man.

'Kathleen, get me my seal from the dressing-case in the bedroom.'

His wife rose without a word and slid noiselessly from the room.

'I'll tell you what, though, doctor: I don't mind if you take my wife in hand; she is too quiet, too spiritless, to be in perfect health.'

'Is that a late development with her?'

'Well, we haven't been so long married for me to know—two years; and part of that time I have been away from her. You see, it's only lately that I retired from business.'

'But before marriage?'

'Ah, she was always a quiet girl; that is why I married her. I thought I'd seen enough of life, you understand, and would like a quiet, modest girl, whom a fellow could trust.'

'As you can your wife?'

'You bet; but, still, one may have a little too much of the *dolce far niente*, you know. If she could only rouse up a little now and again I might be more content.'

'I'll try what can be done.'

'That's a good fellow; do, and earn my lasting gratitude. Hush! here she comes.'

Mr. Wilford, with a mysterious nod, touched the bell for the waiter, who shortly appeared with the drinks ordered.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE BOTANIC GARDENS.

The doctor had an easy and confidential manner, full of that small-talk which generally interests the fair sex, and he was seldom at a loss to keep the ball of conversation in motion; but as he walked through the well-kept paths of the Botanic Gardens this afternoon with his companion, he found it exceedingly difficult to keep up a general conversation, and as they were constantly coming up to, passing, or being overtaken by people, anything of a more personal nature had to be avoided.

She walked silently by his side, seeming to take little notice of her surroundings, or interest in any topic which he started, until he touched upon the subject of the gardens themselves.

Botany she did not know much about, but seemed

to listen as he explained the nature and uses of some of the trees and plants.

By an intuitive instinct of what would interest her most, or from a better knowledge of the subject, he explained the nature of some of the poison plants.

'You use a great many poisons in your medicines, don't you?' she asked abruptly, starting suddenly into animation.

'Yes; they are the most useful medicines we have,' he answered, still avoiding her eye.

They were jerky but suggestive sentences which Kathleen Wilford indulged in.

They were now approaching the artificial pond and getting into the shadow of the trees, with gorgeous groups of flowers and juicy-looking plants on all sides of them—orchids, yuccas, ferns, zamias, and fancy grasses—while above their heads towered waving palms, screw-pines, and semi-tropical outdoor leafage.

'I am hot and tired; let us rest for a moment here.'

She sank as she spoke upon one of the many seats

with which the gardens are so plentifully provided, and folded her parasol.

'Do you love your wife very much, Bernard?'

The question was abrupt and startling, as most of her questions were, yet it did not astonish her companion. An odic communication and interchange of guilty sympathies had been drawing them to one another during these pregnant silences, which made this question but the natural sequence and following up of the former ideas.

'Why do you wish to know, Kathleen?' he asked softly.

'Because I hate my husband and would like him best dead.'

That awful monotonous evenness and softness of accent never altered or rose in its tones; it felt to the doctor as if an inner voice was suggesting murder to him, to which his own evil heart responded.

'He took me from a wretched enough home and gave me comfort and liberty, but nothing else that could satisfy me, for he wanted too much in return.' The even, silky voice vibrated in his heart

and thrilled it coldly. He could just hear the words as they slid one after another into his ear. 'I doubt if any man could do with me or I with him for long; they are all as he is—too human, too good, too weak.'

She laid her hand upon his hand and leaned forward towards him as she murmured her horrid confession:

'I loathed him the first time he kissed me, and made excuses as often as I could to keep him from me; yet I married him because he was no worse to me than the others, and he had the most money.'

'Is he very rich?' gasped the doctor faintly.

'Very rich—richer than I know about; and he has no one but myself to leave it to.'

'Ah!' Crimson visions of gold swept across his mental eyes as she continued:

'When I saw you a week ago, something in you gave me more warmth at my heart than I ever had before in my life; it felt as if I had a force lying dormant within me which could not reach to anyone before, male or female; it woke at the

sight of you, and went out to you while you were standing with me—spirit-feelers, as it were, which showed me to you and made us seem to be one soul. Do you comprehend what I cannot express, my friend?'

'I don't know; I only know that I could wade in blood to have you with me always.'

'As we are, Bernard, as we are?'

'No, altogether as my very own.'

'Ah!' She lifted her hand from his arm and sank back, while a dull flush passed over her face.

'You men are all alike; you can at times be wicked enough, *you* are wicked enough—*we* are both one in that; but—but you are content with too little and demand too much.'

'I will be whatever you like.'

'Listen, Bernard; I love you—hush! do not speak, we may be observed. Free me and yourself from these hateful chains, and all the wealth of my husband shall be yours; be mine, as I want you to be, and I will fill out your existence as no other woman ever could.'

She caught both his hands and looked at him as she spoke, her lips apart, and the pupils of her eyes narrowing until they looked like two thin jet-threads in the centre of the opaque blue iris. A moment, and his heart quivered and grew faint with delight —a fierce, passionate thrill, like nothing he had ever felt before.

'Are you satisfied now, Bernard?'

The low voice seemed miles away—miles of music and rosy flames which lapped him about—while the woman became etherealized and transformed into a loveliness that was more than human.

'How beautiful you are! how I love you!' he answered dreamily.

'Love me, and to *you only* will I be always beautiful.'

She let go his hand and leaned back with closed lids, while the sunshine and broad shadows came back to him; then he saw the same indifferent features with the half-open mouth before him, emotionless and passive.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNT PREPARES TO GO.

'Seven hundred and fifty sovereigns—that's your share in our speculation, I think, doctor. Now, do you want to divide the goods?'

'No, you can keep them.'

'It is rather risky for Dr. Bernard St. Vincent, eh?'

'I don't want them.'

'Well, since you are satisfied, I propose that we split partnership from to-night,' said the count, looking at his friend steadily.

'Why?'

'Well, friend, to be candid with you, our tastes do not run together; you are by far too tragic for my fancy, and if I ever get caught again I want to

be able to swallow my skilly with a quiet conscience, and not see ghosts in my lonely cell at nights.'

'Oh, I see ; I am not good enough for you?' sneered the doctor.

'Hardly ; and I am not very particular, as you know.'

The count had risen, and was now leaning gracefully against the mantelpiece, with one hand in his trousers pocket. Dr. Bernard St. Vincent sat scowling up at him from his chair.

'Very well ; good-night and good-bye.' The doctor rose to his feet and held out his hand.

'Good-bye, doctor.' The count still held his hand in his pocket.

'You won't shake hands with me?'

'I'd rather not.'

'Can I trust you?'

'Damn it, man ! did I ever split on a pal in my life? Did I not go to penal servitude for *you* last time? No, I consider you a skunk of the worst type, and I hope I may never see your false face again ; but you can depend upon me for that much.'

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent gathered up his money, and, taking his hat from the table, slunk out of the door without another word.

The count occupied modest apartments in one of the best streets of Sydney; he did not indulge in any of the idle extravagances which young men in his position so often give way to. There was no bric-à-brac lying about his tables or sideboard, and there were very few books in the tiny bookcase, and those few were all of a practical rather than romantic order—a Sydney directory and Australian handbook, with one or two maps and charts, comprised his stock.

He stood leaning against the mantelpiece for a few moments after the doctor had left, looking absently at his own reflection in the mirror, then started abruptly from his position.

'Yes, it's about time to begin preparing for migration—the summer for this bird is nearly over in Australia. Good-bye, pretty little Mary Burns, and my most interesting widow; will they regret me, I wonder, or join with the others in abusing the absent? I hope, if I do get away, that I shall

never see that evil-omened vulture any more, either in this or the next world—ugh! the thought of him makes me shiver and grow chilly, and I would not wait to see his wind-up for ten years of pleasure.'

The count went over to the side next the window and carefully locked a box which stood there, a strong iron-clamped box painted gray, and picked in with black, such as old travellers might have about them who were used to much knocking about. He next passed into the bedroom, which opened from the sitting-room, and from another box, which he likewise unlocked and locked again carefully, he selected a pair of very much worn trousers, a soiled old red shirt, shabby coat, billycock hat, and a pair of uncleaned blucher boots with common twine instead of laces. Quickly doffing his fashionable suit, he put on this costume and transformed himself into one of the street loafers and wharf hangers-on, who frequent the low lodging-houses and wait at bars for prospective shouts.

'Now for my old diggings, the "New Chum"! I fancy I'll be able to engage a proper crew for my borrowed yacht there.'

The count, amongst his other fashionable tastes, was fond of yachting, and had been fortunate enough to have placed at his disposal one of the neatest and swiftest craft in Sydney Harbour, the owner being at that time on a visit to Melbourne. It lay moored at the Cove of Clontarf when not wanted, beside a little wooden pier and private landng place, and had a smart crew ready to command. He had taken many a trip in this yacht, the *White Ghost*, during the past day or two, about the harbour and round the coast, learning from the men how to handle the ropes and work the tiller, etc., with such assiduity that he was now nearly as adroit as the best of them.

After he was dressed he opened the door, and seeing the coast clear—the landlady at that moment being busy in the kitchen preparing tea—he made his way from the house and along the least frequented streets towards the Chinese quarters.

The 'New Chum' was one of the most disreputable lodging-houses in Sydney, situated in a dirty court within sight of the wharf where the merchant and sailing vessels lay taking in or discharging

cargo, and was chiefly patronized by the crews who came and went in these vessels—a mixture of all nationalities, with a land sprinkling of the worst gaol-birds, who, like the sailors and Satan, went 'to and fro.'

A decidedly shady nest, to which the police paid frequent visits in force, but which they shirked singly, and which only the freemasonry of crime could open to a visitor, while a recommendation from the prison yards was the safest introduction an intruding lodger could bring with him.

To this den the jaunty count wended his steps, and was passed in by the doorkeeper, the stout German wife of the Malay landlord, without more than a slight nod and a friendly smile as he went by the office within which she sat with her bills.

'The boss in?' he asked.

'Yah; you vill vind him in the dining-room. You zal vant your zupper, eh?' she said blandly.

'Yes, I'll stay to feed.'

It was a dirty and dilapidated lobby that he walked through, the walls of weather-boarding, and doors much smashed about, and with hinges and

panels broken and only roughly repaired to suit present convenience.

He stopped at one door, and with his coarse boot kicked it open—a door more abused even than the others, with the traces of greasy, dirty hands sprawling all over it, and splits in the panels through which glimpses of the interior could be seen.

He entered a long room, with two time-stained windows at the lower end, through which could be seen dimly the tracery of masts, cross-trees, and rigging, and at the upper end a whitewashed, low colonial fireplace, where a chain and hook swung down from a cross-bar to hang the pots and kettle on, while a few bricks with movable iron bars made the grate—that is, the fireplace had been whitewashed at some early stage of its existence, but what with tobacco squirtings and grease spillings little of the original colour remained, except in incongruous ghastly spots and patches.

Dinner, or supper, was being served as the count entered, and, without troubling to take off his hat—that ceremony being merely a matter of choice

with the company—with a nod at the gigantic Malay landlord, who stood with carving fork and knife at the head of the table, before a huge hunk of roasted beef, he took his place nearly half-way down the long deal dining-table, where he saw a vacant seat.

A motley and vicious-looking gathering of famished wolves waiting on their feeder the company looked as they glared with one accord towards the landlord, who had begun to hack and slice at the steaming mound, pitching thick layers on to the plate which one servant-maid carried round, while another filled the teacups from a large tin teapot and served round, leaving the boarders to wrangle for the sugar and milk as they felt inclined.

There was a tablecloth over the deal boards, but it had been turned and re-turned for breakfast, dinner, and supper so often that there was no local colour about it, but a fine blending of all tints and tones, the ends hanging down being used instead of table-napkins by the diners.

The earth and its inhabitants were pretty fairly represented here, all sorts and ages of men being

assembled except the very young—the olive-tinted Spaniard, the apish Italian, the red-bearded, sun-bronzed Saxon and Norseman, the almond-eyed Chinaman, the brown-skinned Indian, and the sooty-visaged African; also larrikins with dirty, pale, beardless faces, and hoary sinners with matted, tangled gray and white hair, stamped with the one hall-mark of debauchery and vice.

The count, being a stranger to most of them except the landlord, received a more than ordinary share of attention in the form of scowls and suspicious glarings, to which he paid no attention, but steadily devoted himself to the plate before him, from which he ate heartily enough, if not with the wolfish voracity of the others.

He had always a good appetite, this gay young nobleman, and was only super-refined when in the company of his moneyed dupes; the badly-washed and unpolished knife and fork did not appear to be in any way objectionable to him, and, indeed, like the others, when he wished to clear his handsome teeth, he did not, as might be expected from his fashionable habits, pull out a tooth-pick, but

used quite in a natural way the steel prong of his double-pointed fork.

Notwithstanding his adaptability, something in his manner seemed to arouse the rancour and suspicions of his *vis-à-vis*, one of the most evil-looking, most hatchet-faced of Judas-Iscariot ruffians in the room, for as the young man reached over to help himself to some vegetables, the other clutched the dish, and drew it savagely towards him, saying:

'It strikes me, stranger, that you are too much of a —— big swell for this 'ere establishment.'

He said no more, nor had Victor time to answer his offensive remark before the landlord with one lithe leap was upon the scoundrel, bearing him backwards in the seat, the carving-knife at his throat, and hissing in his ear:

'Look yer, mate, this youngster is my particular friend, and if you or any man at this supper-table finds fault with him, I'll slit yer —— wizen, as ye know I can;' and the keen-edged knife pressed dangerously near the drawn-back windpipe.

'No offence, boss, no offence,' gasped the cowed bully; 'I thought he was a stranger.'

'Wall, he ain't, and that's enough for you, Jake Ross.'

'Sartainly, sartainly, boss. Some purtaties, young fellow?'

Jake held out the dish with an ingratiating smile towards the count, who helped himself with a cool 'Thank you,' and went on to finish his supper as if no interruption worth mentioning had taken place to disturb the harmony, while the burly landlord walked back to his carving once more with a stolid brow.

After supper they adjourned into the apartment which went by the title of the parlour while the things were being cleared from the dining-room; here they lit pipes, and soon became invisible to each other in the dense fumes which filled the room.

This was the opportunity which the count had waited for, so, drawing the Malay landlord along the lobby until they got to his own private parlour, they sat down, and over a bottle of rum began to negotiate business.

'Yes, I can get you the right sort for your purpose,' said the landlord, after a good deal of haggling about price; 'in fact, there's half a dozen boys in that 'ere parlour who would be glad if they could slip quiet enough out of Sydney Harbour at the present time.'

'That's the sort for me.'

'Well, let's have them in.—I say, Bertha!' yelled out the landlord in stentorian tones, putting his head into the lobby, 'come here for a moment.'

The fat mountain of flesh was heard waddling along the lobby from her office, and the next moment she appeared filling up the doorway.

'Vell, vat you vant?'

'I want you to send half a dozen of the boys you can most depend upon, and who want to get away from New South Wales without attracting too much notice. You know them better than I do, so pick them out now, and send them along.'

'All racht, you zal have vat you vant, mine leetle friend,' observed she, jocosely patting the count on the cheek with her fat forefinger; 'you

vill vant to be gone avay soon now, von't you, mine son ?'

'Yes, mother, it's about time.'

'Ver vell, you zall. I say, thank you for von leetle locket keepsakes ; it was very nice.'

'Glad you like it.'

'I vill keep it vor your sake ven you are var avay.'

The overfed landlady swung her great bulk away and disappeared within the doorway of the parlour.

'She knows what's best for you, never fear ; have another drain.'

In a short time the landlady passed the apartment where the two men sat, saying as she passed them, 'Day are coming,' after which she retired once more to her office and accounts.

Dan Jose, the great landlord of this establishment, was respected by his lodgers as large-muscled men have ever been respected in primitive society ; he could knock down any man who differed in opinion from him, and generally backed his arguments with these ox-felling blows. He was

equally ready with his knife to carve a leg of mutton, or, as he termed it in his mild nomenclature, 'cut the liver out of his enemy'; so that the men who frequented his table and parlour preferred to refer to him as arbitrator in their disputes, rather than have him, in the heat of the discussion, fix upon his own side.

The landlady was enormously fat, tallow-faced, and asthmatic in her habits, seldom moving from her own chair in her post of observation, but for all that keeping a sharp supervision over all departments of the house; everything and everyone going in or coming out passed under her scrutiny, and woe betide the impostor—*i.e.*, the honest pretender—who attempted to slip into that sacred company, as one of them, unless she chose to shut her eyes.

While the count and his landlord were still smoking and sipping their grog, six men slid out of the tobacco-clouded parlour and came into the room.

'Good-evening, boys,' said the count, giving them a nod.

'Good-evening, mate.'

'This yer friend of mine wants ye to ship with him for Batavia; are ye all willin'?'

'If so be as he is a safe friend of yours, boss, then we all say "Done" on the spot.'

The speaker was Jake Ross, who slouched forward to the table and stood overlooking the count.

'Are you the leader of these boys?'

'Wall, yes; they generally picks me out, when there's any *business*, to represent them.'

'And you are all ready to agree to what Jake here and myself settle upon?' asked the count, turning round to the five men who stood in the lobby and doorway.

'Yes, mate.'

'Very well, you can go back to the room, then, and call for your drinks while we arrange; and you, Jake, sit up and fill your glass: we'll talk business in a very short time.'

The dining-room table being now cleared, the men, having a little amusement on where room was required, returned in a body, the lamps being placed on side-brackets of the rough weather-board walls for safety.

The amusement for the evening was characteristic of the place—viz., a fight between two bull-dogs. At the present time they were both confined in old sacks, waiting for the preliminaries and bets to be arranged and recorded in due form.

'Now then, boys,' shouted the landlord, entering with Jake Ross and the count, 'are you all ready to begin?'

'Yes, boss.'

'Then fire away; put the pups on the table, and let them start the game. Make a ring.'

The owners of the dogs lifted them out of the sacks, and took their places with the beasts facing each other.

'Now, then.'

With a savage snarl the dogs rushed at each other and locked together, rolling over and over the table until they dropped on to the floor, never relaxing their united grip, but spattering the place and the excited crowd with blood as they gnawed away at one another.

It was a short conflict on the part of the dogs, and a matter of considerable dispute on the

part of the different sides as to which had won, seeing that both were dead when the battle was over.

'Your pup caved in first,' yelled the owner of the one, looking up from his knees with blood-stained hands and face at the rival owner, who, in a similar condition, knelt and glared at the other.

'It's a —— lie; my darg drew the larst breath.'

And then, as the dogs had done before, the masters closed with one another, rolling over amongst the delighted onlookers' legs, and scattering chairs about wildly, as they struck out and snapped and bit at one another while they struggled.

'Five to one on Jemmy Piper; let the master decide.'

'Go it, Jemmy!'

'At him, Bob!'

The turmoil was terrific, and even the burly landlord failed to produce order, in spite of the disputants that went down before his great fists; when all at once the gurgly tones of the landlady fell upon them:

'Mine Gott, vat this —— row vor? Here comes the police.'

In a moment the place was quiet enough, and the fighters, relinquishing their grip, gathered up the remains of their dogs and crushed them into the bags, while the landlord and one or two others hastily put out the lamps.

'Good-night,' whispered the count to Dan Jose; 'let me hook it before they come in.'

'This way,' said the landlord, opening a little door in the side; 'that'll let you out the back. Now, boys, the tablecloth, and light the lamps again.'

The same much-used tablecloth is pitched over the blood-stained table as the dead carcases of the bull-pups are thrown under it, the landlord slides the bolt home again after the count's hasty exit through the little door, while some of the others light up the lamps, as the main door is burst open and a bevy of policemen rush in.

CHAPTER XII.

'WHOM DARE I TRUST IF HE IS FALSE?'

BLANCHE ST. VINCENT had one of those natures which, when they trust, trust utterly.

Her husband had been in her eyes a summary of all the virtues and a paragon of affection; she had yielded up her young heart eagerly, and with it surrendered all her other impulses and inclinations in his favour, to turn in what direction he pleased.

But lately a cloud had come over the spirit of her dreams, and she was growing miserable, and, as she shrinkingly had to acknowledge to herself, suspicious of him and of everyone.

'Whom dare I trust if he is false?'

False he was, and had been from the first hour in which she had given him her virgin faith;

nothing had been too common for him when in the mood, and no one sacred where he had the power.

Blanche did not know this, of course, and until he had lately shown the brutal side of his character, and almost openly boasted of his infidelities, the recording angel with the special page of sins in his hand would not have been able to convince her, so utterly had she shut her eyes to what all the world saw and spoke about.

She saw the business decreasing daily, and the respectable patients who had given their confidence to her late father gradually veering off, while the people who mostly visited the surgery now, or recognised him when out with her, were fast-dressing, loud-talking ladies; but she put that down to his youth and good looks, which attracted the giddy flies and failed to inspire confidence in the more sober or middle-aged.

That afternoon, while the doctor and Mrs. Wilford were together in the Gardens, she had been taken very ill almost immediately after swallowing the medicine left her by her husband, and compelled,

much as she disliked the assistant, to submit to the attentions of William McTaggart.

Rough and awkward as she had hitherto always considered him, she lay wondering between her fits of sickness and violent retchings at his tenderness and sympathetic care, as she watched him with her half-closed eye, as he moved about far more deftly and with lighter footsteps than the housemaid who was helping him.

When he spoke to her he seemed to forget his usual accent and roughness of tone, and surprised her by the purity of his pronunciation and his rich cadence. Was it the same man whom she had found so objectionable, now smoothing her pillow for her with the gentle, tender touch of a mother? She had closed her eyes to listen the better to his directions to the servant, and opened them to watch the man himself.

Had he been acting a character, and for what purpose? As she furtively glanced up at him, she saw the same rough, unkempt beard and shaggy, ill-kept hair, but the rest of the face was refined enough—a strong, straight nose, well-formed eyes,

and broad, high, intellectual forehead; the mouth had lost its ordinary inane droop and simper, and the lips were closed firmly and sternly, while the eyes shone and the eyebrows frowned as if he were thinking of some unpleasant matter.

Somehow, as she looked at him, she felt her unreasonable dislike going by degrees, and even found herself speculating on the difference that a good crop would make in his general appearance.

She was somewhat better when her husband came home that night, and for a moment pretended to be asleep. She felt him come over to her bedside and look down at her, and with a sigh opened her eyes, expecting to see the same sympathy which she had read on the face of his rugged assistant.

How she shivered at the first glimpse which she got of that worn, white, and demoniac face, which bent above her with a glare of expectancy and disappointment, as it seemed, at her being still alive!

It was like a lightning flash blasting in one fell stroke her full-grown tree of trust and faith, for it

was the face of a brutal murderer, impatient at his slow work.

'Bernard! what is the matter with you?' she gasped, starting up and grasping his outstretched hand.

'Go to the devil!' he cried harshly, shaking her grasp off and staggering over to a chair, where he sank down, glowering in savage drunken hatred upon the carpet.

He had been drinking after he had parted with Kathleen Wilford and her husband, going from bar to bar on his way home, so that he seemed to have lost all caution.

'Go to the devil, I say, with your prying and watching me for ever, so that I have no liberty of action. Do you think that I am the kind of man to be tied to one woman's petticoats for ever, whether she be a wife or not?'

Blanche watched him with staring, astonished, and horrified eyes, but answered him not a word.

'I won't endure it, I tell you, Blanche; and if you don't like it you must lump it, my fine lady!'

The reaction of his enervating interview with

Kathleen was upon him, and he felt furious, he knew not at what, and was thirsting to take it out of someone, the more unoffending the better.

'Have you taken the medicine I left for you?' he asked suddenly, as he again looked at her.

'Yes, Bernard, and was so ill after it that I thought I was going to die.'

'You die! not a bit of it; you are not so easily killed. You are like your stiff-necked old father; it will take a lot to polish you off.'

He snarled and looked at her with this cruel expression so new to her, and the under lip protruding and scarlet.

CHAPTER XIII.

McTAGGART MEDITATES.

McTaggart sits alone in the laboratory, for the doctor and Blanche have gone with the Wilfords to the royal picnic at Clontarf.

He had been working at a case of teeth all the forenoon, with the interruptions of patients coming now and again which took him for the time being away. John Wilks has gone his round with the medicine, so that the housemaid answers the door when the occasional ring comes.

He has laid down the set at last, finished, and takes up the short, well-blackened clay pipe, which he fills, after carefully cutting the quantity required from a half-cake of ruby-twist—one of the finest tobaccos in the world, but only to be procured at reliable shops in the colonies.

It was not a lady's tobacco, but it was a full quaff of comfort to a man. He rolled up the flakes which he had cut off, and slipped it into that well-toned clay, never polluted by any vile mixture from the days of its virgin purity, but fed always with true Virginian, sun-dried, hard-pressed, twisted leaf, the monarch of all tobaccos.

Having lighted his pipe, he sat down to meditate, for he was much perplexed in his mind.

He had saved his employer's wife so far from the evil attempts of her husband, but how long he could help her, or how best to warn her of her danger, was the matter which troubled him at this present time.

He had seen her before she left for Clontarf that morning, and, while she thanked him warmly for his kindness the evening before, he had read a new expression upon her face, a look of horror, which could not be covered by the conventional smile with which she greeted him.

'He must have shown a bit of his hoof,' he murmured, 'and she seems inclined to take me into her confidence. If I could only be sure that a warning

would be taken in good part, I'd give her one to be on her guard, and I think I could do it better direct than through a third party.'

At this moment the housemaid put her head in at the door, and said :

'Mr. Mac, here's Mrs. Skittles' maid come to get your advice about her toothache.'

'Bring her down here, lass, an' I'll fix her up;' then he muttered, 'the very woman to help me out! I'll ask Mrs. Skittles to invite her to stay with her out of the way until I can put him past working any further mischief. Ah, I suppose I'll only win greater dislike than ever from her when I bring my self-imposed task to a conclusion.'

Mrs. Skittles, having lost her money, was forced to postpone her elopement until the remittance of her lover came to hand. To say that she was disappointed scarcely expresses the state of her ardent feelings; but as the count spared no effort to comfort and console her for her pecuniary losses, she had gradually settled down to accept the inevitable, a few weeks more of delay; nay, as the count said, 'My letters of credit may come at any

moment, and then you will know how much I love you.'

To-day Mrs. Skittles, with the count, had gone to Clontarf, like all the rest of the Sydney world. He had taken her and—to cover their romantic intrigue—Miss Mary Burns, with a few other friends, in his borrowed yacht, and, as it was her own particular request that he should divide his attentions equally so as not to attract attention, she could not complain if, in his docility, he spent a good deal of his time by the side of the younger lady.

'Only a mere chit of a girl, you know, dearest,' he whispered in her ear, when her placid face was inclined to show a ruffle.

'Well, perhaps it isn't so bad as if it was a woman you were showing so much attention to, but still—be careful, Victor.'

'I will, my dearest.'

So he fluttered about the deck, keeping peace all round; the chit of a girl—who, by the way, was past eighteen—looking on the widow as too much of a motherly woman to be a rival, and the other looking on Miss Mary as too much of a child

to trouble her where her gallant lover was concerned.

Mr. William McTaggart examined the young maid's tooth, and after a little manœuvring and dissimulation, with a dexterous wrench on his part and a blood-curdling shriek on hers, he presented her with a cup of tepid water and the offending member within his forceps.

Then the balm of Gilead stole over the heart of the girl, and, grateful for her deliverance, she could sit down and talk to her deliverer.

She was a favourite with her mistress, and had great influence with her—or, at least, she had been a favourite before the coming of the count, who, she said to her confidants, was as much of a count as McTaggart.

'Weel, I dare say I could count a' the money I ha' belonging to me as well, if no' better, than he could.'

'I'll go bail you could, Mr. McTaggart; but I tell you what, he is only making a fool of the old woman, and never means to marry her.'

'And a guid job for her if he doesna. Now,

Bridget, my dear, have you seen Mrs. St. Vincent lately?'

'No.'

'She is far from well, and I want you to give your mistress a hint to invite her to stay with her for a bit.'

'Oh, I see; she is finding out what a beast she has married, and has taken to moping.'

'That's it, Bridget, exactly.'

'Well, I only have to give missus that hint, and she'll jump at it, for she is lonely herself, and wants a companion badly; and, although she has been making a fool of herself lately, she is kind-hearted. I'll do it this very night.'

'That's all the fee I want, Bridget, for drawing your tooth out. Get Mrs. St. Vincent away from the doctor as soon as you can, or she'll no' live long.'

'Oh, the brute! The people do say he poisoned off the old man.'

'And maybe they are no' far out, either; at any rate, she'll be safer away at the present time.'

A look of horror overspread Bridget's shrewd face as she grasped his meaning.

'I'll tell missus the moment she gets home to-day, and she'll come and fetch the poor young thing. Ah, the blackguard! we all know how he deceives her, but we didn't think he could be so bad.'

'Tak' my word for it, lassie, nane o' ye can think ower badly of this Dr. Bernard St. Vincent.'

After Bridget had gone, William McTaggart re-lighted his pipe and looked more contented.

'I think that hint will spread wide enough for Mrs. St. Vincent to hear, and then I can speak more openly, after her friend Mrs. Skittles has prepared her for my news.'

CHAPTER XIV.

A MOONLIGHT SAIL.

THE picnic at Clontarf had been an excitement all day long, with the gay costumes of ladies and the gold lace and gilded buttons of naval dignitaries; for the great personage had come out in full force and dazzled all beholders with the splendour of his surroundings.

An exciting picture of sunshiny skies, blue waters, white sands, music, champagne, flirtation, and heart-flutterings, to be concluded by an event which might have been a tragedy—the attempted assassination of the royal visitor.

It was the lively count who chanced to be amongst the crowd surrounding the great one and who knocked up the assassin's arm and so saved the precious life of this favourite of an enthusiastic

city. It was Dr. Bernard St. Vincent who, when the horrified cry arose for a medical man, plunged forward and just missed distinguishing himself by his services, from the fact of another doctor being a single pace in front of him—the first time Fortune had ever deserted him.

When it was ascertained that the distinguished visitor, then at the height of his colonial popularity, was not seriously injured, the count became the hero of the hour—he was publicly thanked by the wounded hero, and this time definitely invited, not only to the saloon of H.M. warship, but also to Government House, before the *élite* of the colony. He might have dipped his slender fingers into purses *ad libitum*, so eager were all his friends to appear connected with him. With a sad smile the count surveyed this increase to his popularity.

'A pity that it comes so late,' he murmured to himself.

Nevertheless, like the industrious young man he was, he improved the shining hour by moving about and lightening the pocket-books and purses of his enthusiastic admirers as much as he possibly could

do without raising their suspicions, and then, when he could carry no more, or rather borrow no more, he returned with bulging pockets to his allegiance to the fair sex.

He had seen with his quick eye that Blanche was unhappy and ill-looking, and, partly out of pity, partly to keep his fair widow employed, he had brought the ladies together and left them while he went over to *feign* a little with Miss Burns.

But Mrs. Skittles had her lynx eyes upon him, and gave him to understand, when on one occasion during the day she had come upon him with his arm round Mary's slim muslin-covered waist and their heads dangerously close together, that there was a limit to feigning, and that he must draw the line outside such close quarters. It was after this encounter that the count had gone for a little stroll amongst the crowd, to recover himself, and so arrived just in time to earn the lasting gratitude of the colonies.

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent and Mr. Wilford had been inseparable all the day, drinking freely together; that is, Mr. Wilford had given way mostly,

and now, as afternoon drew on, was so far overcome that it was with difficulty his friend could keep him on his legs. When they reached the place where their conveyance stood waiting, they found Kathleen sitting waiting for them on the seat.

'I am afraid that Gilbert is not in a very fit state to drive to-night—will you kindly do it, doctor?'

'With pleasure, Mrs. Wilford. I'll just tell Blanche to go home with Mrs. Skittles.'

The count received the doctor with marked coolness when he asked him if he would take Blanche with his party.

'Certainly, Dr. St. Vincent, if the lady does not object.'

But poor Blanche, only too eager to be away from the presence of the man who had so ruthlessly torn the love-bandage from her eyes, assented with such alacrity that the doctor scowled darkly upon her as he turned away to rejoin his guilty companion and their intoxicated dupe, while the count led Blanche towards his own friends gravely.

There were no effusive farewells between Kathleen and her old school-friend this time; the slightest

bend of bonnets towards each other as the doctor, gathering up the reins, turned his back rudely upon his suffering wife, and drove away into the gathering gloom. Mr. Gilbert Wilford reclined limply on the back seat of the little dog-cart, with his head lurching forward, his left arm dangling over the side, and his right in his trousers pocket; Kathleen sat quietly on the right side of the front seat.

'Have you known my husband long, Count Linski?' said Blanche, as they approached the landing-place where the yacht lay moored.

'Yes, a considerable time now,' replied the count shortly.

'Oh!'

Blanche said no more, for she saw that the count seemingly did not wish to gratify her curiosity.

They set sail after taking tea, which was served on deck, just as the full moon lifted itself over the distant waters outside the Heads and filled the ocean and harbour with myriads of silver ripples. It was a delicious sail, during which the count and his male friends were allowed to smoke their cigars with the ladies, while all went merry as a marriage

bell, notwithstanding the accident at Clontarf that afternoon.

They speculated about the probable doom of the would-be assassin, who had been already half lynched by the crowd before the police could hustle him off to gaol.

'He'll be hanged to a dead certainty.'

'And serve him right for bringing such a disgrace upon this loyal colony.'

'You have not recovered your money or jewels yet, Mrs. Skittles, have you?' observed one of the gentlemen.

'No,' answered the widow, with a most profound sigh as she recalled all the consequences of that robbery; 'but the police have some good clues which they are busy following up, and they are very hopeful about the affair.'

'They generally are very hopeful,' observed the count, watching a wreath of smoke rise into the air like rings of frosted silver; 'and they always get good clues—if nothing else.'

The count had a sweet tenor voice and a choice *répertoire* of songs to suit all companies. He was in

glorious form to-night, and as they tacked from side to side of the harbour, on their way to Darling Point, he poured out selections from the operas, sentimental bits and serenades, which made the widow droop and melt with tender tears of languishing pathos.

A delicious sail, with that sweet, clear voice in their ears, and the lights from the villas which they passed shining out of the gray-green indefiniteness of rock, foliage, and buildings, with the water rippling and lapping beneath them, and the white lustre from above bathing the clean deck and figures which lounged about it, now partly in shadow as they sped across the lustre-track with the great silver disc behind them and the bulging sails jet-black, now tacking on the other slant with the canvas gleaming brightly like sheets of polished tin.

The moon grew in intensity as the night deepened, until its effulgence fell with the clearness of electric flames, and hearts thrilled, even the most prosaic, with a romance and melancholy suited to the tender pathos of the faces.

'How exquisitely beautiful!' sighed Widow Skittles, while she looked on her coming property with humid eyes, as he carolled out his plaintive ditties with his pale face turned moonward and a bright glitter in his blue eyes. 'Mine, mine to be so soon, my own true love. I cannot wait long—I will not wait long; what is money compared to this?'

He was now singing 'Still I love thee,' with his eyes by this time turned in a tender manner upon the fair hair and downcast face of Mary Burns:

'What should make thee sad, my darling?
Why those pearly tears I see?
Have I caused one thought of sorrow?
Have I not been kind to thee?'

The amorous widow grew hot and jealous as she saw the direction of her Romeo's wandering eyes.

'Why should I wait any longer?' she thought, with less romance and more practical sense; 'why endure any more feigning or subterfuge? I will draw two thousand from the bank to-morrow, and make the poor boy happy without delay.'

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. SKITTLES ENTERTAINS.

When the *White Ghost* arrived at the little landing-jetty, Double Bay, Blanche saw her husband's assistant, amongst a few other loafers, awaiting her arrival.

There were half a dozen men sitting on the planks with their legs dangling over—rough-looking customers, who held lines between their knees, as if they were trying to catch fish—but they paid no attention to the gay, laughing company who were landing.

The count led, the widow and Miss Burns on each arm. Blanche was following, when McTaggart stepped forward, and with a grave bow offered her his arm, which she took.

'You have some bad news to tell me, Mr.

McTaggart, about my husband! What is it?' whispered Blanche quickly, as they stepped from the gangway plank to the wharf.

'I have been sent from him to tell you that he will not be home to-night, as Mr. Wilford has met with an accident during the drive home, and he will have to attend to him.'

'What is it?'

'Nothing very serious yet; he must have fallen out, and, I believe, wounded himself with his revolver—which exploded as he fell.'

'You will be wanted also, will you not?'

'No; the doctor says he will be able to manage by himself,' said McTaggart slowly.

'When did you see Bernard?'

'Half an hour ago. He came to the surgery for his instruments, and asked me to meet you here and tell you about it, so that you might not be alarmed at his absence.'

'Unusually considerate of him!' said Blanche bitterly.

'What is it, Blanche?' asked the widow, looking back.

'Mr. Wilford has met with an accident.'

'Oh!'

Mr. Wilford was almost a stranger to the company, so that his mishap did not awake much interest with them. Therefore, without further remark, they all proceeded to the house of Mrs. Skittles, where they intended to finish up the evening.

'You can give the men a night off, Mr. Reed,' cried out the count loudly to his boatswain; 'and go yourself also. The boy will be enough to look after the yacht and make me a cup of coffee when I return. I shall sleep on board to-night.'

'Thank you, sir,' replied Reed, touching his cap and going aft as he spoke.

The boy was one of the count's own choosing, and had come to attend upon the cabin—a slight-built, dark-eyed, pretty boy of about sixteen, called Jack.

Mrs. Skittles was of a hospitable turn, and asked Mr. McTaggart to come in to supper with the others when he had escorted Blanche to the door: an offer which he calmly accepted, much to Blanche's

astonishment, who had never seen him in refined society before, and naturally thought that he would betray some confusion and awkwardness. However, he belied all her fears by his complete unconcern of the popinjays about him, or their amused smiles at the roughness of his costume.

He did not apologize either for the condition of his dress or the unkempt state of his hair and beard, but quietly took his place at the table between her and Miss Burns, handling his knife and fork in the orthodox fashion, and filling up the gaps of conversation with appropriate remarks.

Blanche could hardly believe her ears ; his voice seemed to have lost its usual gruffness, and with the raspiness also most of the vernacular breadth of accent. An English ear could discern the natural intonation, but that was all.

The count contributed to the mirth and repartee of the evening, while McTaggart gave it weight. He had not much sense of light humour about him, but he could cut in with a sharp word and add emphasis to the jests with which the count seemed

brimming over — they took to one another immensely over the supper-table.

A rare scintillation of crystal cut glass and silver, with a rich glow of fruit and crimson-shaded lamps; while beyond the open French windows and Chinese lanterns swinging about the veranda lay cool stretches of moon-bleached gardens, showing out green and tempting from the dusky framework of passion-vines that wreathed the ornamental iron posts.

'You will stay with me to-night, Blanche, since the doctor is not coming home?' observed the widow.

Blanche, about to refuse, caught McTaggart's eye, and altered her mind in consequence of what she read there.

'Thank you, Amelia.'

McTaggart breathed easy; so far, so good.

After supper the gentlemen adjourned to the veranda to smoke, while the ladies hovered between that part and the drawing-room, where tea was standing in the free-and-easy style of colonial houses. The widow, Blanche, and Mary Burns played by turns.

Count Linski found himself close to McTaggart.

'Have a cigar, doctor?' holding out his case, beautifully chased in silver, with his family crest—a fox rampant—and the motto *Dum vivimus vivamus* carved in the centre: a gift that morning from the enamoured one.

'Thank you, count.'

William McTaggart bit off the end, and, lighting it, gave a few solemn puffs in silence.

'A lovely climate this to live in, where one can always depend upon the moonlight showing up to time. Don't you think so, doctor?'

One of the count's maxims of success was never to omit giving a man a title where he could possibly tack it on.

'Yes; a beautiful place and a perfect climate. It seems a pity to have to leave it; does it not, count?'

'It does! Are you, then, meditating a flight, doctor?'

'No; but *you are*.'

'What do you mean, sir?' The count looked hastily round as he spoke.

'That I'd like a few words with you before you go.'

'Hush! not so loud. I'll find a room where we can talk. Excuse me for a moment.'

The count moved over to the drawing-room, where the widow and Blanche were sitting together, while Miss Burns sat playing a waltz air on the piano.

'Could I take the liberty of asking for the use of a private room for a few moments, Mrs. Skittles, as Dr. McTaggart wishes to talk to me about some business?'

'Nothing the matter with your health, my dear Vic—count,' cried the fond Amelia, starting up quickly, and in her alarm almost betraying the nature of their relationship: a lapse of caution which drew upon her a faint smile from Blanche, and a sidelong glance of scorn from the squatter's daughter.

'Nothing at all about health. It is only a little business.'

'You can have the house to use as you like, Count Linski,' answered Mrs. Skittles, regardless

alike of the look and smile; 'my boudoir—the library — any room most convenient for your purpose.'

'The library will do, madame.'

'Then go and lock yourselves in. You will find a lamp lighted there, and refreshments.'

'Thank you.'

'Men all like refreshments along with their business; it makes things go smoother, so Skittles used to say.'

And as the late Mr. Skittles never did business without refreshments, and succeeded so well in all that he undertook, he should have been one of the best authorities on the subject, alive or dead.

Count Victor Linski beckoned to William McTaggart, who followed him as he led the way into the deserted library.

Having fastened the windows and secured the door, he turned to McTaggart, and, motioning him to a chair, flung himself into another, saying:

'Now perhaps you will be good enough to explain your words.'

'I do not think they require explanation to

you, count,' answered McTaggart quietly, as he looked at the other steadily through a wide ring of cigar smoke; 'you know very well that you intend taking the grand trip to-night in the *White Ghost*.'

The count looked at him quietly for a moment.

'What are you?—a detective?'

'No!'

'Will you try to frustrate my intention, if it is as you say?'

'Not in the slightest, so that you give me the information I want.'

'What do you want?'

'I want some information from you regarding your old friend Dick Lawson—known here as Dr. Bernard St. Vincent.'

'Ah! you know his name, it seems.'

'Yes; I know all about him, and how he has lived for the last four years, which is far enough back for me and my purpose.'

'And do you know mine also?'

'Yes.'

'Then, my friend, you ought to know that I

never gave away a pal even to save my own carcase,' replied the count dryly.

'I know that perfectly well, Jack Robson, and I have not asked this interview to threaten you; I only throw myself upon your generosity, and ask you to help me to save the life of an innocent woman from the hands of the blackest scoundrel unhung.'

'Who the devil are you?'

'Never mind who I am, or what I am doing this for—will you help me or not?'

'Will you blow the gaff on my little game if I refuse?'

'No; but I shall think less of you. Why, man, here's my hand, if you can take it—the hand of an injured honest man. I know what you are—a most magnificent swindler who has fleeced the Sydney sheep, and now intends making away with the wool; but I also know you have never yet dirtied your soul with blood, and I want to save you from doing it now. Will you take it?'

McTaggart held out his hand, large but shapely, to the other, who hesitated.

'But I am not accountable for the action of another.'

'Yes, when you can prevent it and won't. Why, Jack, if that poor girl is poisoned, you will never be rid of her ghost all your life, in prison or out of prison. Look at her to-night, with the frozen horror in her eyes for the fate which she now feels to be in store for her—the fate of her honest, kind-hearted old father, who made the fortune of the murderer. Jack, you are a swindler and a thief, and when you are caught you will be able to expiate your offences against society.'

'When I am caught!'

'That's what I say; but can death ever expiate the foul treachery and cowardice of this merciless hyena? Be true to your pals, when you find that they are pals; but draw the line, lad, draw the line.'

'You are right; he has been a treacherous skunk in the past,' murmured the count.

'Who led you into the scrape and left you to bear the burden—you know, the Western Australian trip—and would have rounded on you

again if he hadn't wanted you to help him! By heavens! in this world of thieves and villains I reckon you to be almost an honest man; but if you go to-night without leaving me the means to help Blanche Mellibar——'

'St. Vincent, you mean.'

'No—Mellibar; you know it's the only name she has any right to. Well, if you leave Sydney without doing that last act of bare justice, then you will be beneath the notice of a kinchen layer.'

'Dr. McTaggart, one word before I yield.'

'What is it?'

'Do you intend to give Lawson up?'

'For the sake of the girl he has wronged I will let him slink away if he can, if I don't shoot him myself; but you have my word for it—I'll not use my power to bring him into the hands of the law.'

'Then here is my hand on it—for the sake of this pretty girl I cave in.'

The two men clasped hands for a moment and sat down again.

'Now, what can I do to help you?' observed the count briskly, as he poured out two glasses of spirits, and held the water-jug over the glasses. 'Say when, doctor.'

'That will do. I have a full account of Lawson's acts as far as *you* know about them—his different marriages, with the dates, etc. I only want you to read it over, and, if correct, sign your own name and *alias* to it—your signature should be pretty well known about Sydney.'

'Pretty well, as far as I.O.U.'s are concerned,' answered the count, with a light laugh.

'Then read it over while I finish my smoke.'

William McTaggart pulled from his breast-pocket a bulky manuscript, written in an exceedingly neat small hand, and without a single mistake or blot.

The count read it through carefully, smoking as he read, and when he came to the last page, he said as he rose:

'A beautifully-written document, and as exact as a judge's summing up. Where shall I sign?'

'There.'

'May I add a remark?'

'As many as you like.'

The count sat down and wrote, reading as he went on:

'"This is a true record of the life of my one-time partner, Dick Lawson, in every detail. Signed by me, Jack Robson, *alias* ——"'

'Hold a moment; we shall want two witnesses.'

'But my name?'

'Ah, well, cover up for the present what you have written.'

William tore off a slip of note paper, and with some postage-stamp margins, which were on the desk, gummed the slip at the edges over the writing.

'Are you two gentlemen going to stay all night talking business?'

It was the voice of the impatient Amelia, who had come to hunt up her precious count.

'She will do, eh?'

'Yes.'

The count opened the door, saying:

'Come in for a moment; we are just done,

and I want you to witness my signature to this document.'

'Have you been making your will, count?' asked the widow archly.

'No; merely buying a property which my friend here has discovered and reserved for me.'

The count wrote his assumed name at the under edge of the slip—Count Victor Linski.

'I will put my seal to it in your presence,' he added, with a gentle but rather sad smile, taking his signet-ring (also a gift of Juliet's) from his finger and stamping the wax, which he had melted with a vesta.

Mrs. Skittles blushed as she took up her pen, so suggestive was it of another ceremony where she hoped to sign this surname for the last time.

'Witnessed by Amelia Skittles.'

'Thank you, my dear. Now, doctor.'

McTaggart wrote his name in the same small hand, while Mrs. Skittles and the count stood a little distance away, looking at one another tenderly.

After he had signed he blotted it, and, folding the blotting paper up with the manuscript, put them again into his pocket.

'That's all right now, count, and our business is done.'

'Then we have just time for another song before I go. Come, Dr. McTaggart; come, my charming lady!'

The count laughed lightly as he led the way to the drawing-room, with Mrs. Skittles happy and proudly clinging to his arm.

'What shall I play?' murmured the widow, looking up fondly in his face as she settled her voluminous skirts around the music-stool and trailed her fingers over the piano.

'Oh, something operatic; from the "Bohemian Girl," say. I feel sentimental to-night. Try "When other lips."'

They all gathered in to hear the last song as the count sang it. He gave it full expression, as if he felt the words, and, as this song always does affect hearers when properly sung, the tears stood in nearly all their eyes as they listened.

It was over, and the count and guests were bidding adieu to the hostess and Blanche, who accompanied them as far as the gate.

'Good-night; good-night.'

The count was the last to shake hands.

'Good-night, Amelia.' He bent gracefully over the fair, plump hand, and kissed it regretfully and lingeringly. 'Good-night—and good-bye.'

The last half of his farewell was murmured *sotto voce* as he turned on his heel to accompany McTaggart as far as the bend of the road.

CHAPTER XVI.

GOOD-BYE TO DOUBLE BAY.

The widow, with Blanche, looked after the retreating figures as they got merged into the green mistiness of that electric moonlight, then, with a joint sigh, re-entered and fastened the gate.

'Isn't he a dear fellow, and so clever, too!' murmured Amelia, thinking about the count.

'A thorough gentleman, for all his rough exterior,' murmured Blanche, letting her thoughts for a moment wander to McTaggart.

'Rough exterior!' exclaimed the widow indignantly. 'Why, he is handsome!'

'Do you think so?'

'I am sure of it; anyone could see that with half an eye. Why, you must be blind, Blanche.'

'I fear that I have been,' meekly responded Blanche, putting her arm around the waist of her plump friend and drawing her into the house.

Meanwhile the gentlemen, with Miss Burns, went along the level way together until they reached the bend of the road, where the hill began; here they paused before separating.

'Won't you come on board, gentlemen, and have a parting glass?' asked the count.

'No, thank you, not to-night,' responded the brother of Miss Burns, in which refusal the others joined—all excepting William McTaggart, who replied:

'I don't mind if I do spend another half-hour in your company, as I am in no hurry to go home to-night.'

'That's right, old fellow.'

The count shook hands all round once more, with just a softer, longer squeeze to the little hand of Mary, as their eyes met for a moment, hers conscious and his tenderly melancholy, and then he and McTaggart were left alone.

Both men instinctively and mutually turned on their heels from the retreating company and looked towards the house which they had left.

Only the chimney-stacks and portions of the roof could be seen from where they stood, and they were dim and uncertain in their outlines, yet that seemed to be enough for both.

'Fare thee well, and if for ever——' said the count lightly, after clearing his throat of a suspicious huskiness, while he filipped his fingers across his eyes. 'Nasty things good-byes, are they not, doctor?'

'They are!' replied McTaggart deeply.

'Hallo! what's the matter with you? Is your heart under those slates also?'

'I expect that is about it.'

'Ah! now I am easy on the score of Dick Lawson; that will so far protect him.'

'Yes, it will keep him from the gallows—at any rate, if I can help it.'

'Well, I wish you all success, and him the only benefit left to wish him—an easy, quiet, and quick despatch. Do you know, you show some nerve in

coming to my yacht to-night with my secret in your breast-pocket!'

'I'm not afraid, my dear fellow; I can look after number one.'

'Very well; the fox makes you welcome to his lair.'

The jetty was deserted entirely as they went along the echoing planks towards the *White Ghost*, which loomed spectral-like upon the waters at the far end.

As they approached the gangway, several heads peered out of the fore-hatch, and went quickly out of sight again.

'You need not hide, boys; it is a friend,' called out the count, and McTaggart saw the six rough-looking men who had been dangling their legs over the wharf appear one after the other and slouch forward.

'Have you got all the boxes aboard?' asked the count to the one who stood in front of the others, and who displayed the hatchet-face of Jake Ross.

'Yes, sir.'

'Where are they?'

'In the cabin.'

'Right you are; now get things ready for a move. She's still grounded, isn't she?'

'Yes, sir, but lifting fast; another half-hour, sir, and she'll be afloat.'

'That will do; move softly, and keep a look-out for shore, in case any of the old crew come along.'

'What will we do if they come—knock 'em on the head, eh?'

'Certainly not; you'll all disappear down the hatches and leave me to manage them.'

'So, so!'

'Come down, doctor, for a few moments.'

Down in the cabin they found the boy who had been left in charge sitting at the table under the swinging lamp, reading a yellow-covered novel.

'Dinah,' said the count quietly, upon which the youth glanced up. 'Permit me, doctor, to introduce you to *Mrs. Jack Robson*.'

The disguised girl rose, and, with a merry smile parting her red lips and revealing a dazzling set of

ivory, held out her hand, which McTaggart took carelessly, as if he had been quite prepared for the introduction.

'Going on your wedding-trip, I suppose?' he observed by way of saying something.

'Oh dear me, no!' she replied, with a burst of loud laughter; 'Jack and I have been spliced this three years past; I am quite an old married woman. But just wait till I get these togs off, will you? It's safe enough, I suppose, Jack, isn't it?'

'Quite safe, Dinah; only look alive.'

'I'll make up in two twos,' she merrily replied, as with a light step she darted inside one of the berths.

'Your wife isn't of a jealous turn, I should say, count?'

'No, the countess is a regular brick; I fixed upon her in New Orleans, and she has followed me about ever since.'

'I thought she had just a touch of colour.'

'Yes, but she is real grit, for all that—always cheery and always ready to help.'

'A good wife. Well, I must say, count, I consider that you are a more plucky man than you gave me credit for being.'

'Why so?'

'To trust yourself in the hands of such a crew. I think them about the ugliest set of cut-throats I have seen this many a day or night.'

'Oh, I'll be able, with Dinah, to manage them all right.'

Dinah here entered, attired in a tight-fitting crimson velvet bodice and black silk skirt, made short enough to show a neatly-turned ankle and high-heeled coquettish shoes; she had the bodice open at the neck and high in the sleeves, while on her wrists and shoulders gleamed the diamond necklace and bracelets which were last seen on the dressing-table of the deluded Amelia.

'This is better, Jack; don't you think so?'

'Oh, you are a regular toff! But come, brew the doctor and me some whisky hot in your best style.'

Dinah moved about briskly with bejewelled bare arms and neck gleaming, and her dark gipsy-like

face glowing, while she handled the glasses in quite a professional way.

'Lemon, sir?'

'Thank you.'

'Sugar?'

'One lump, my dear.'

Mr. McTaggart, as he watched her motions, forgot that he was not in a bar, and fell quite naturally into the manner which men have of addressing barmaids; indeed, as she placed the drink before him and her husband, his hand instinctively sought his vest-pocket before he remembered that he was a guest.

'My shout this time, doctor,' observed the count laughingly, as he noticed the action.

'I beg your pardon, count and countess.'

'Pray don't mention it, for I believe Dinah would have taken your fare, had you offered it, so used is she to that sort of life.'

'You just shut up, Jack, with your nonsense.'

'I am never uneasy to leave Dinah alone, for she can always manage to pick up a living for herself.'

'And for you too, old man, if wanted,' said Dinah, with a tender look at her lord, while she flung one lovely arm about his neck and left it there.

'Here is to you and your lady,' said McTaggart, holding up his glass; 'and a safe voyage.'

'Thank you, doctor,' touching glasses; 'and may the same success attend your efforts as I hope for in mine!'

The toast swallowed, Mr. McTaggart rose to go.

'A quarter to four o'clock,' said he, looking at his watch.

'And a flowing tide,' responded the count, rising also, and leading the way to the deck. 'Farewell, doctor, if we never meet again.'

'Let us fervently hope not, count. Good-bye, Madame Dinah.'

'Good-bye.'

Next moment he is standing on the pier, watching their preparations for flight. Jake Ross and his hang-dog friends are hard at work shoving off, for the gangway and hawsers are all in, while

the count and countess stand close together on the aft deck.

The men, having got sufficient sea-room, now take to the oars to row out to where the wind can catch the flapping sails—a fair wind all the way down the harbour after they get out of the bay; the moon is well into the west now, and occasionally covered with fleecy morning clouds.

'You can tell about me to-morrow morning if you like, doctor, and give the Sydney police some fresh clues to follow up respecting the Double Bay robbery,' shouted out the count, as he stood with one arm about his wife's slim waist and the other waving gracefully towards the lonely watcher ashore, who only shook his head in a negative way.

The land wind has caught the sails now, and the men draw in their oars while Jake Ross springs to the tiller, as the yacht leans over and makes a sudden leap towards the southern point.

'Good-bye!' rolls back the clear boyish voice of the sham count, as he takes off his wideawake hat and waves it about, while from the side of his

most suitable life-partner flutters a glimmer of white.

'Good-bye to Double Bay.'

The six convict heads appear above the gunnel, with the clasped couple by themselves, as the *White Ghost* rushes past the corner and disappears, leaving William McTaggart standing alone on the deserted wharf.

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN WILKS TRIES HIS HAND AS A MEDICAL MAN.

'Has Mr. McTaggart come yet, Wilks?'

'No, sir,' replied John Wilks respectfully.

It is morning in the laboratory, and the doctor has just entered, white to ghastliness, haggard, with bloodshot eyes and quivering lips.

'Ah, I'll wait a few moments, as I want to see him particularly before I go out again.'

The doctor strides up and down the room with hasty steps and rapid turnings about, while, over the top of his lexicon, the boy watches his tiger-like motions with timid, frightened glances.

Up and down, to and fro, like a wild beast in a cage, he goes, while he clenches and unclenches his hands and gives vent to fierce mutterings.

Once he pauses and looks at the boy, who instantly buries his head over the book.

'What have you there, Wilks; a shilling dreadful, eh?'

'No, sir; it's my Latin lexicon, which I am trying to learn.'

'That is right, that is right; study Latin, and you may be a doctor some day. How do you pronounce that word?'

The doctor takes down from the shelf a bottle filled with powder, which he proceeds to open.

'Cicuta, sir.'

'Quite right; now give me the English for it.'

Dr. St. Vincent has never taken notice of his errand-boy so much before, and John feels both amazed and frightened at the unusual condescension.

'I don't know, sir.'

'Find out, Wilks, find out.'

He fills and folds up a paper with it, which he places inside his pocket-book as he speaks, and then hastily jerks out his watch and looks at the time.

'Half-past nine! Mr. McTaggart is late this morning, and I can't wait for him any longer. Tell him to take my place this forenoon until I come back.'

'Yes, sir.'

'If wanted very particularly, say I am at Mr. Wilford's, who is sinking fast.'

'Yes, sir.'

'But unless it is very important he must not send for me, as I wish to see the end—that is, if I cannot pull him through.'

The doctor goes out of the door with a rush and is gone.

'Something wrong with the guv'nor this morning,' observed John to himself, when once more left alone; 'got the shakes, I should say.'

He goes over to the bookcase, where some medical works are, and lifts up a large dictionary, which he brings to the table and turns over.

'Cic—ay, here we are: "*Cicuta*, hemlock; *conium maculatum*, *conium majus seminibus striatus*, Linn. Class, *pentandria*; order, *digynia*. Effects, giddiness and trembling, with blindness, sickness, heat,

and thirst." Ah, I am getting on; *cicuta*, the hemlock.'

There was a door which led from the laboratory into the lane outside. At this moment, while John is busily studying the dictionary, the face of Barney Moore, XA 42, flattens itself against a corner of the window, and looks in upon the student.

Barney Moore's eyes roll round the walls of the room, while the face has lost its usual bloom.

'He took a wonderful large dose with him,' murmured John, looking reflectively at the bottle still standing as the doctor had left it with the stopper out. 'I suppose it is for Mr. Wilford. Well, I hope he'll enjoy it, that's all.'

'John, hist! Johnny Wilks! Mr. John Wilks, Esq.!'

Barney Moore has opened the door just far enough to insert a corner of his helmet and the full view of his upturned nose, usually crimson rose-tinted, but now like that fragrant flower gone a little stale and purple.

'By all the gods, Barney, is that yourself?' said

John, looking round and recognising his early visitor; 'or is it *Alter idem?*'

'Meself, Master John; and yet not meself at all, at all. But are yez alone this fine morning, and is the doctor out on the road?'

'The doctor is *non est* and I am *solus;* so Barney, my boy, you may *accedas ad curiam.*'

'Don't, John darlint, don't!' murmured Barney, holding up his hands imploringly.

'Don't what, Barney?'

'Don't kill me altogether wid yer larning. I am not well this morning, or I might be able to stand it aysier. You're sich a mighty deep-read scholard, John, that it makes me back ache to hear yez.'

'Sit down, Barney; sit down, and tell us your news.'

'Well, me boy, to give you the plain facts, without a word ov a lie, as I was standing over beyant there by the corner of the street, in my customary modest and illigant manner, keeping one eye for duty and the inspector, and the other on the pretty shop-girls going to their

work, I sees a man, who I thought might be your master—— '

'Barney Moore, what the deuce do you mean by that insulting adjective?'

'Well, the medical party as yez honours by going messages for. No offence, John, no offence.'

'That is a shade better, *mutato nomine;* you may proceed, Barnibus.'

'Well, seeing what I thought might be this medical party, only for his pale face and wild manner, rushing past me in the devil's own Tipperary hurry, says I to myself: "If so be as that is the doctor of the present going along there, he must be out; and my friend—the doctor as is to be—will be left by himself all alone amongst the bottles and drugs, and may be so far free as to give me the benefit of his mighty knowledge."'

'*Nunquam minus solus quam cum solus*, and also as I might add, Barney boy, *Nunquam non paratus*.'

'Oh, good Lord, John! I'll faint downright if you give me much more on them.'

'I'll try, Barney, to let you have it easier; but

you know it is hard at times to find an English word to express my meanings just as I want them expressed.'

'Yes, John, that must be it; so I'll bear it if I can, and as long as I can, if so be as you'll spake English when you can: even though it may not be quite so clear to yourself, I could get along wid it better, and jump at all the rest.'

'Go on, Barney, go on.'

'Well, seeing the coast quite clear and nothing suspicious near at hand, I whipped off the badge from me arm and gently dodged around by the lane to find out how your precious health was, and if you could give me something for me throuble.'

'Ah! you are not *ad unguem*, Barney, I see.'

'What might be the maning ov that mountain, John?' asked Barney anxiously, with a troubled face.

'Ah, yes; I forgot again, *Magna est vis consuetudinis*. Pardon me, Barney. It means you are not up to the nail.'

'Och, but your larning would bother a dominie! Yes, I was better.'

'And you suffered a relapse, eh?'

'No, sure; it's the devil's own sore head that I suffer from, and no re-lap at all, at all.'

'Headache—ah! *Naturam expellas furcâ, tamen usque recurret,*' murmured John, rubbing his beardless chin absently with his forefinger and thumb.

A dazed film gathered over Barney's fishy eyes as he caught part of this absent-minded murmur, and for a moment or so he held his hands to his forehead, while his knuckly fingers clutched frantically at his carroty shock of hair; then, calming himself by a mighty effort, he said in a tone of singular meekness and resignation:

'John, me friend, I know that yez cannot help yourself; I can see by yez this morning that yez have sat up half the blessed night getting them all in, and that they must come out; and I don't wonder at it—no one could wonder. But if you'll only kindly consint, with your usual good sinse, and out of human pity towards a poor unfortunate member of the police force who is suffering at the present moment from natural causes, just to spit out all them nasty words that don't agree with the

inside of your brains at once, I'll just step beyant to the kitchen sink and hould me head under the water tap until you are quite free ov the dirty scum, and thin I can tell you me throuble and go, afore I am missed off my bate.'

There was such a world of mournful pathos thrown into this appeal, that even John felt touched into magnanimous pity.

'Barney, I did not mean to be unkind. Go on; I will not give you any more.'

'Thank yez, John; yez always had the feeling heart, whatever might be the matter wid yer head. Well, to get at the subject properly and quickly, I was on duty the day before yesterday all night, and as I was walking along wid me hands folded in front ov me, according to the rule ov the force, and me glazed cape over me shoulders, I hears a low whisper, like a snake's hiss, and says I to myself, "It's someone drunk and disorderly, or else a housebreaker at work, and therefore no business ov mine," so I just kept walking on as if I hadn't heard it. Presently I hears the same sound again, with what I took to be "Hist, Barney, d'ye hear?"

Thin says I, "Sure an' it sounds like a faymale voice—a faymale in distress maybe, and wanting the support ov Barney Moore." Wid that I turned me round wid majestic steadiness, and sure enough there was Mary O'Connor herself, crying out of the kitchen door for me to come down on business. She remarked that it was a cold night for the time ov the year; which same I agreed to as I slid past her into the kitchen, where there was both a good fire and a good supper waiting on me, for you see Mary always had a leaning towards the members of the force, and likes to encourage them in their stern duty. Hardly, howsomever, had I planted myself beside the plate, and just as I was reaching over to saze the knife and fork wid me fists, like a Christian gentleman, when a thundering peal comes to the front-door bell, and Mary bawls out: "Och, by the holy powers, but it must be the master come home from the theyatre afore his time, bad scran to him! Ayte it up, Barney; ayte it up quick, an' get out!" Which same I did, John, although it was a mighty hurry, which no knife or fork could ever race with.'

'I'll bet you bolted it, Barney, before you skedaddled, or——'

Barney clapped his hand quickly over the incorrigible quoter's mouth, and so nipped the threatened infliction in the bud, as he continued:

'What with the awful haste and the heat of the bird, being fresh out of the oven, and the cowld when I got out, I felt the devil's own disturbances in the part where I had stuffed Mary's master's chicken--which she, of course, had to blame the thief of a dog for, bad scran to the baste, that I wish had got it as well as the blame: for I felt dreadful bad over it.'

'Hum! So this is the cause of your indisposition?'

'My what, John?—bring yourself down a pace, me bould boy.'

John touched his head significantly, not having words simple enough, for the moment, to express his meaning.

'Oh, I say; me throuble, you mean?'

'That is so.'

'Well, yes, this and just a thrifle more. "Barney,

me boy," says I, "you are onwell, or going to be; and if you could only drop across some dacent Christian gentleman kicking up a shindy, who might be induced to trate you to something sthrong and warm in order to get off, you'd be all right." The clock just then tolled out twelve; so, acting upon the thought, without more ado, I shapes my course towards the city. I got down the length of King Street, when I fell upon some rollicking young rams, wid plenty of money and no brains, making a fine noise and yelling out music-hall ditties like lunatics; it wasn't my bate, of coorse, but what on that when the public pace was being broken? I did not mane to be hard on the young men, seeing that they had plenty ov manes, only stiff enough to let them know that someone else had a parching throat as well as thimselves, so I just moved up to them, and says I, "Good-evening to yez all this early morning." "A peeler, by Jove!" they all shouted, crowding about me; "let's make him as drunk as a colonial magistrate for a lark!" and they pulls out their brandy-flasks in no time, ordering me not to attempt to resist at the peril

ov me soul. "Gentlemen, be aisy; I'm in your power, and I'll take my punishment without resistance." Thin one after the other they pushed their flasks between me teeth until, begorra, they hadn't as much as would wet the wings of a fly amongst them—an' that's all.'

'You'll be *caput mortuum* if you go on at this rate, Barney.'

'Maybe, John; all as I know at present is that I be mortal bad, and I want yez to give me something to put me all right.'

John rose up with an air of reflection, while Barney watched him anxiously and admiringly.

'Let us see: *tinctura sinnæ*, *jalapus*, *kali tartaresatum*—ah, that will do the trick, I think, with the addition of a little *aqua distillum*.'

'Och, but look at that now! isn't he the illigant physayshun? Just look at his fine roaming nose, independent ov nothing, which wouldn't turn down for nobody! Arrah, ma cushla, but aren't all the girls breaking their hearts after him? John, dear, phat's the powder that you're putting into the glass?'

'Have you not heard me say the name, you duffer?'

'Yis, yis, ov course I did. Arrah, but he'll work the perfect cure!'

'Here, Barney, drink this right off,' said John, who had heard, but betrayed no consciousness of hearing these running commentaries on his good qualities.

'Thank you, me friend.'

Barney, accustomed to tilting up glasses swiftly, made the mixture vanish like a trick of magic, while John, with professional pride, watched him; the hand was much slower in coming down, while an expression of profound disgust banished the flattering leer which hitherto had overspread the apish features like oil on dirty water.

'Sure, John darlint, is that the right stuff?'

'The identical mixture, Barney, *simplex munditiis*.'

'Ah, but it is the nasty mixture. Well, I must be going.'

'Hold on a moment, Barney. Do you see that bottle with the stopper out and the powder in it?'

'Yes, John. What of it?'

'It looks innocent enough, does it not?'

'Sure it does. What's its name?'

'Cicuta.'

'And a mighty cute name, too. What is it?'

'Deadly poison,' replied John solemnly.

'Pizzen! ouch, be me sowl, and a powder! John, you scoundrel, but I begin to feel singular. Bedad, and you gave me a powder! bad luck to it, but is it pizzinin' ye're after now wid all your learning? There is a strange commotion going on about me,' and Barney held up his hands in horror.

'Ah, you're all right; I didn't give you cicuta.'

'But you gave me something else with a French name to it.'

'Latin, Barney, not French.'

'Worse, a thousand times worse! I have met one or two decent Frenchmen, but never a respectable Latiner. Ah, but it's the bad counthry is Latindom!'

'It's not a country, but only a language, Barney —a dead language.'

'An' sure, what the devil has a dead language to be kept alive at all for, unless it is for the priest to patter his masses with? I must go now, young man, but you'll hear more on this matter, depend upon it!'

Barney made a dash for the door, his face crimson with fear and rage at what he considered to be a vile attempt upon his valuable life, John watching him wide-mouthed with astonishment.

At this moment it was opened from without, and William McTaggart entered with a grave face, receiving the full force of the Irishman's well-fed body, which sent them both staggering in opposite directions.

'What the mischief is the meaning of this?' asked William, first recovering himself and looking at the pair sternly.

'Oh, murther! adding violence to deceit!' roared Barney. 'Let me out quick, ye pizziners, while I have strength left to run!'

'Poisoners?'

'Yes, he has dosed me properly, the thief!' and Barney pointed like an avenger at John.

'It's a lie, sir; I only gave him a mild cathartic. It was the cicuta bottle that the governor was using which frightened him.'

'Cicuta! who for?'

William made a plunge forward, and so left the way clear for Barney, who took advantage of the opportunity to rush out of sight while the other was examining it.

'Did the doctor take this quantity out?'

'Yes, sir; he wanted to see you before he went, as you were to look after the house.'

'Where has he gone?'

'To Mr. Wilford's, who, he said, was dying.'

'Ah, this must be put an end to, and at once.'

Mr. McTaggart drew out his pocket-book and wrote a few lines within it, tearing out the leaf when it was finished.

'John!'

'Yes, sir.'

McTaggart was speaking good English now, and the boy seemed to notice the alteration and lose his familiarity.

'Get an envelope for me.'

John ran out to the study and returned with an envelope, into which McTaggart put the torn leaf, closing it again, and addressing it.

'When Mrs. St. Vincent comes, give her this; meantime, turn away any patients who may call. I must go out also this forenoon.'

'Yes, sir.'

John watched him leave the door, and then drew himself up proudly:

'Turn away good patients! Not for John Wilks, M.D. I'll try them on myself, if they'll trust their cases to my skill. I know enough Latin now to keep them going, no matter what the complaint may be. *Ab uno disce omnes.*'

CHAPTER XVIII.

MURDER.

NINE o'clock in the morning, after a night of wakefulness and watching.

Kathleen Wilford sits with the daily paper in her hand, which gives a full account of yesterday's attempted murder at Clontarf and last night's accident to Mr. Wilford.

Both had been affairs in which pistols had played their part, the one handled by a mad assassin, and the other—an accident.

Kathleen read over the account of the one, which filled up about three parts of the paper, and the other, which was accounted for in a few sentences—these latter Dr. Bernard St. Vincent had supplied the reporters with.

The paragraph was brief, and read as follows:

'Last night, as our well-known and much respected fellow-citizen Dr. Bernard St. Vincent was driving home from Clontarf with his friends, Mr. and Mrs. Wilford, of Victoria, the latter gentleman fell from the back seat of the dog-cart, and with the concussion exploded a revolver which he carried in a back pocket, the bullet, we believe, lodging between the shoulders, and, as far as can be yet known, injuring the spine. Fortunately his friend was on the spot, and promptly attended to his wounds, although up to the time of our going to press there is not much hope of his recovery.'

'Not much hope,' murmured Kathleen, with a spasmodic movement of her mouth; 'and there will be less on the next going to press.'

'We cannot sufficiently express our disapprobation of gentlemen carrying these dangerous toys about their persons. In former years, when society was not on the secure basis that it is now, such a practice might have found an excuse; but now it is not only a useless precaution, but an affectation

which could only emanate from our younger sister, Victoria.'

'Security of society and the semi-tragedy of Clontarf all in the same column—very nice.'

She had moved over to the window, and sat half concealed behind the curtains when the waiter came in to remove the breakfast dishes. Either he did not notice her where she sat, or else he did not care to disturb her, and she did not move all the time he was in the room.

There was no sound from within the sick-chamber, and it might have been death, so deadly quiet was the feeling surrounding the figure in the chair by the window.

Out in the open the morning sun was lighting up the opposite side of the street, but this room was in shadow.

Heavy green damask curtains, which cast a twilight grayness over everything—she had chosen this room in the hotel because it was shady—and for the objects of decoration, a large water-lizard case almost filled up the window, left behind by some unfortunate collector, who

had been compelled to leave with his bill unpaid—a large case, with aquatic plants drooping over the ornamental rocks and shells, which formed miniature grottoes, within which swarmed rare specimens of the water-reptile world, gathered from every part of the earth. An enthusiastic collector he must have been, who had not considered his money until it had taken wings and fled far away, never to return.

Loathsome objects to look at, as fantastic as the raven of Edgar Allan Poe, and as suggestive of disasters and defeat to their original possessor, in that darkened, death-haunted back parlour. They magnetized the mind with their ungainly motions and dingy indistinctness—for, alas! the hotel servants were too much occupied with life to change the water of these voiceless exiles—until the onlooker grew cold and hopeless even in the hottest day, and felt a despairing voice whisper in his heart the meaningless refrain of the raven, 'Never more.'

The paper which covered the walls was of that indefinite, subdued, and patternless confusion which

looks old when new and keeps pretty well in the same condition for ever.

There was something about the room symbolic of the woman who sat there with the paper on her lap—an air of apathetic waiting, a stillness that was not repose, but rather felt filled with haunting and nervous unrest.

She sat still as a snake might lie in wait, no movement of her hands, no heave of her breast, but with the white lashes covering the colourless eyes, and the complexion lightless and without tone.

Ten o'clock. As the last distant stroke falls from some steeple in the city, the door opens, and Dr. Bernard comes in, shutting it carefully behind him.

He enters, white-faced, with the movements of an automaton, as if worn out and spiritless, moving over to where she sits motionless, after laying his hat, gloves, and cane on the table.

'Bernard!'

The white eyelashes are lifted up, and the lifeless orbs, with the two narrow, snake-like threads

of black intensity in the centre, transfix his blood-shot eyes, holding him still for a moment, then bringing him to her knees with a babble of incoherent endearment.

'Have you brought the poison?' she asked calmly.

'It is here, Kathleen,' he answered tenderly.

'Then mix it up and finish this weariness, for I am tired and want to rest.'

The idiotic words are chilled on his lips while he rises to his feet, and going over to where the water-jug is standing, he takes up the glass, and emptying the cicuta-powder into it, covers it with enough water to dissolve.

He is working mechanically, with the white set face in which all the evil of his past is concentrated and frozen—a face of dull despair and hopeless engrossment—tilting the glass about gently to melt the sediment, with his back to the woman, and the mirror over the mantelpiece reflecting his ghastliness and the moving glass in his trembling fingers.

'Quick, my love! The press reporters may be

here shortly, and they must have *news*,' she whispers anxiously.

He starts violently at the voice and wheels about, holding out the glass towards her in silence.

'Is it ready?' she asks softly.

'Yes.'

'Then give it me.'

The snake is active now. With a leap forward she takes it with one hand, while she coils her other arm round his neck, putting her expressionless face with the strange eyes up to his, and, darting her lips forward, suddenly prints a stinging kiss full upon his, which makes him shudder.

'Wait here till I come back.'

With the poison-glass in her hand she glides rapidly from the room, leaving him clinging to the table, with the tapestry tablecloth clutched and wrinkled in his hands.

A moment, but it seems an eternity to him as he holds on to the tablecloth, his teeth chattering and blackness in his sight, and she appears without the glass.

'Bernard!'

'Yes, Kathleen.'

He does not move, but still keeps his hold by the table.

'I cannot get him to swallow it; his teeth are clenched like lockjaw, with a froth round the lips. What shall we do?'

'Is he sensible?'

'I think so, for his eyes followed me about.'

'Then leave him alone! he will come round shortly.'

'No longer, Bernard; I must be free. I will not bear this suspense any longer—love!'

She lays her hand, cool and moistly soft, upon his, and at the touch all his evil resolutions seem to be suddenly braced into action.

'Look at me, Bernard, and say if you love me still.'

He looks now at her, and as he does so his face lights up with a quick flush.

'Love you! My God, I would wade through oceans of blood for you!'

He tries to embrace her and draw her to him as he repeats this mad speech.

'Don't, Bernard; you are hurting me.'

His arms once more relax and fall by his side limply, while he stands in front of her like a slave.

'What do you want?'

'Go in and smother him, Bernard; it will be easily done, for he cannot move now. Take the pillow and press it over his face.'

She whispers this to him with her weak mouth close to his and her breath mingling with his breath. Still he hesitates.

'Another moment may be too late. If you want me, go—go.'

Backwards, with his lurid brown eyes fixed upon her, he moves towards the bedroom, while she stands facing him, her two arms outstretched, the palms upwards.

'Go—go!'

Slowly backwards he moves step by step, with a horrid look on his face, as if in a nightmare. He

retreats until he reaches the door, which he shoves against and opens that way, and so disappears.

Fixed as a half-moulded image in soft, pink-toned wax, she poises with a slightly higher flush upon her brow, her arms outspread, and her hands rigid, towards the bedroom into which he has gone, her small flat head thrown back, and the dull-tinted flaxen hair closely coiled.

Ha! there is something disturbs her, for she starts with a livid face, and turns towards the sitting-room entrance, listening intently.

A rapid rush of feet along the landing and the door is thrown open with a bang, while William McTaggart strides into the room impetuous as a winter blast.

'What is it?'

The doctor appears at the bedroom door, his coat off, with shirt-sleeves rolled up and a pillow in his grasp.

'I want you, Dick Lawson—thief, dastard, and murderer!' shouts McTaggart, rushing upon him and closing with him, while Kathleen Wilford sinks

upon a chair and begins twisting her boneless fingers about one another passively, the flush on her face dying slowly away, and a clayey shade taking its place.

CHAPTER XIX.

DR. BERNARD ST. VINCENT.

The result of a wrestle between the two men could not be doubtful, even in the doctor's best health; but, weakened as he now was with the unhealthy excitements of the past week or so, he was like a child in the arms of a giant.

One close hug, and the next instant he was sent reeling against the wall of the bedroom, while the other turned to where Mr. Wilford lay.

'Not dead yet; then there is hope.'

He pulled down the bed-clothes and turned the insensible form round on his face, tore off the bandages from the pistol-wound in the shoulder, and set about examining it keenly.

'Ha! the bullet not yet extracted, and forced inflammation.'

Dr. Bernard St. Vincent — or, rather, Dick Lawson—rose up and made an effort to brave it out.

'Leave my patient alone.'

'Your patient! Pooh! sit down and wait till I am free to talk to you. No, sit over there; the police are outside, and will arrest you if you attempt to go out of that door.'

'On what charge?'

'I'll tell you presently.'

For the next five minutes he occupied himself entirely with the insensible man, washing the wound and extracting the bullet, at the end of which time he turned about and said sharply:

'Now, Lawson, where is that cicuta powder you took from the laboratory this morning?—quick!'

The peremptory tone cowed the doctor.

'It's in that glass.'

'Ah, dissolved, I see.'

He gave a quick, searching look at the guilty

man, and, after testing the strength of the liquid, dipped some linen into it and spread it over the wound, bandaging it up once more and laying him back again as he was before.

'Now, my man, for you; come into the other room.'

McTaggart led the way into the apartment where Kathleen Wilford still sat as before, the doctor following him, sullen and dogged.

'Dick Lawson, sit down.'

Bernard sat upon the couch, keeping his eyes fixed on the floor, while the other began, in a cold, professional tone, each word cutting as a knife:

'I have only a few words to say to you, but they will be enough to settle *your* case, and show you that I know all about you. It is now four years since you were expelled from the Medical College of Philadelphia, and forbidden ever again to apply for a diploma—you know for what.'

'It is a lie.'

'You married a young lady the same year for her money, and, having squandered all that she

possessed, you left her to starve or go on the streets.'

No reply.

'Three times you tried the matrimonial dodge—twice in America, once in England—before coming out to Sydney.'

Kathleen still sat twisting her fingers about without emotion.

'Next crime, attempt to murder a student in Glasgow who had just won his diploma; you left him for dead, and took your way to London, where you applied for and obtained a situation as a ship-doctor, with the diplomas and under the name of your victim.'

The doctor started and looked up for a moment at McTaggart, then dropped his eyes again.

'Next, a situation in Sydney, where you won the affection of the daughter and murdered the father in cold blood.'

'It is all a tissue of falsehoods.'

'True as gospel, as I can prove.'

'Prove it, then. I say it is a lie.'

'There!'

McTaggart took the MS. from his breast-pocket and held it out at the last page, signed by the count and himself.

Dick Lawson looked at the paper and then at McTaggart.

'And who the devil may you be?'

McTaggart, who had been standing all the time, put up his hand with a quiet smile, and, making a tug at his beard and hair, pulled the whole mass off together, revealing a clean-shaven face and dark, close-cut hair, the face of a man of about twenty-eight.

'The man whose diploma you stole in Glasgow—the real Dr. Bernard St. Vincent!'

CHAPTER XX.

A CLOSED SCENE.

THE game was over, and, as far as Dick Lawson was concerned, lost without a point.

'Curse that traitor, Jack Robson!' he muttered to himself, as he sat sullen and with downcast eyes before his accuser.

'Don't waste your time cursing him,' replied the real Dr. Bernard, as he looked down with contemptuous pity on his abject enemy. 'Jack Robson stuck to you as long as he could—much longer than he should have done; at the present moment I would occupy myself with thinking what is the best thing to be done now for my own self, if I were you.'

'Do you mean I should escape?—do you mean

that you will let me go?' asked Dick Lawson, looking up eagerly, and with a glimmer of hope in his hungry, inflamed eyes.

Kathleen Wilford had up to now been sitting with an apathetic air, twisting her flexible fingers about one another, and seemingly watching them only; but as the sham doctor now spoke, she raised her head and darted a dull look at him, while her mouth twitched; then she looked down once more at her working fingers emotionlessly.

'No,' said the doctor deliberately; 'I am a Scotchman, and have been injured by you, and it requires more Christianity than we have left in this nineteenth century for a Scotchman to be able to forgive an enemy such as you are. I shall not let you go.'

'What will you do with me?'

'Give you up to justice; have the body of Doctor Mellibar exhumed. It was arsenic you poisoned him with—arsenic instead of sugar in his last glass of whisky, and that keeps bodies for a long time; you have skill enough to know that, as well as to impose upon an ignorant public, although you have

little enough knowledge of science. I will see you hang as surely as you are sitting there now.'

'What shall I do? what shall I do?'

The craven murderer, who had not paused to take life whenever it served his purpose, clasped his head in his hands and rocked himself to and fro with miserable despair.

'I cannot attempt to advise you in this extremity,' replied the doctor pitilessly; 'I might know what to do myself, if I were in your position' —he glanced over in the direction of the revolver case which lay upon the chiffonnier. 'If you were a classical scholar, you might revert to olden precedents and those examples of the ancients who found themselves in your position; even failing being a scholar, you have seen the wonderful rendering of Marc Antony by Walter Montgomery, a week or two ago, and must remember how he acted when the battle was lost; but then you are not a Marc Antony, nor yet a mile behind him. Ah! fine fellows, with all their faults, were those noble old Romans! but you are not a noble

Roman, Dick Lawson, so I suppose you must go to gaol instead, and get *hanged*.'

Kathleen Wilford rose and went over to her lover as the doctor ceased speaking, and taking hold of his two hands, drew them from his ghastly face.

'Come, my friend, be brave; I will teach you what to do.'

The wretched cur looked at her with his staring eyes, and as he did so a flush stole over his face, and he rose up.

'Ah! that is better,' remarked the doctor; 'try to meet your fate as like a man as it is possible for *you* to be.'

He passed over to the bedroom door where the insensible man lay, and turning the key, took it out and put it in his pocket.

'I am going down to the sergeant of police, who is waiting for me in the hall office below. I shall give you five minutes to arrange matters between yourselves and get your wrists ready for the irons. No more than five minutes, recollect; after that they will come up to arrest you.'

He went out with one last look at them, locking the door behind him, and leaving the key in the outside. They were prisoners.

They were both face to face as he left them together, she with her hands clasping his, and her elongated pupils pulsating like an india-rubber band being drawn backwards and forwards, he with flushing face and quick gasping breath.

'A peculiar type of will-force,' muttered the real Dr. Bernard St. Vincent, as he went downstairs; 'almost worth studying, if one had time.'

'Good morning, clerk,' he said, as he reached the office.

'Good morning, sir.'

'Had a good season?'

'Fairly well, sir. Do you want a room?'

'No; I was only up inquiring for Mr. Wilford.'

'How is he now, sir?'

'Oh! he'll recover all right; it isn't anything serious; no worse than the Duke's mishap.'

'You don't say so? Why, I understood he was dying.'

'No fear of that.'

'But——'

At this moment the sharp echoing detonation of a pistol-shot broke upon their conversation.

'Hallo! someone firing inside this house!'

Another loud report following the first brought landlord, waiters, and visitors thronging out of the room into the hall.

'What is it, landlord?'

'I don't just know yet, gentlemen, but I'll soon find out;' and the landlord, followed by the rest, bolted two steps at a time up the stairs.

'They have done it, I really do believe,' muttered the doctor to himself as he followed the crowd.

'I smell gunpowder on this landing,' said the landlord, sniffing about keenly as he looked about him.

'Yes, it comes from No. 10.'

He knocked sharply at the door, but received no reply.

'Will you open, please!'

Still silence.

Another knock, and then he turned the handle.

'Locked!'

'Yes, but look, the key is outside; open it at once, landlord.'

The landlord turned the key and the handle and opened the door, while the people behind him crowded into the room.

A thin mist and odour of saltpetre filled the apartment, while on the carpet the two forms were lying on their backs, with their left hands clasped, and from each forehead a tiny rivulet of blood trickled.

Then the avenger stepped forward and said in curt tones:

'Landlord, send at once for the police; I am a doctor, and will look to the bodies until they come.'

CHAPTER XXI.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS AFTER.

'I AM not fit to marry you, Bernard!'

'Not fit to marry me!—you mean McTaggart is too rough for you, too much of a boor!'

'No, Bernard, be serious; think what I am—the widow of such a monster, whose life and crimes have become public property.'

'Well, Blanche, if that is your only objection I think you may as well cave in. The name I am offering you has been a good deal damaged of late, so that you need not be so particular—if you accept, that is—if you care enough for me to lighten a life which has not had many sun-rays across it.'

'Ah, Bernard! you know I would do anything to make you happy.'

'Then be my wife, Blanche; and I will ask no more of fate or fortune.'

'Of course she will, doctor,' said Mrs. Skittles, coming round the corner of the garden. 'I did not want to listen, but I heard, for all that, and can tell you that this foolish girl loves the very ground you walk over.'

'Oh, Amelia!'

'Well, isn't it true? When that naughty swindler the Count Victor went off and left me broken-hearted, didn't you tell me all about it, by way of consolation? and now that I have been consoled by a better man, and seen how foolish it is to trust to romance in this prosaic age, do you think that I am going to see you leave yourself out in the cold? I have just consented to marry Mr. Wilford, and I intend that you shall do the same with the doctor there, and so still retain the name that you have worn so long. I am sick-tired of sentiment and romance, which only costs money and gives one the rheumatics.'

'So the poor count is forgotten, Mrs. Skittles?'

'No, doctor; he shall never be forgotten while I

have a bank-book to remind me of him. He is what I would call a financial memory—something to endure for a life-time.'

Mr. Wilford at this moment made his appearance from behind a camellia bush. They were having a garden party at Mrs. Skittles', of Double Bay, to celebrate the birthday of the widow.

Mr. Wilford was all right now, and since he had been pulled through his illness had once more got up his faith in doctors and a reliance on widows, Mrs. Skittles having taken him home and nursed him after the death of his wife.

'No more quiet young things for me, doctor,' he had said. 'Give me a bouncing woman who can melt a bit, and feel like a human being, for my money.'

'Well, Blanche, is it to be or not to be—two weddings and happiness all round, or one, and misery to two forlorn hearts?'

'I suppose I shall have to say "yes," just to oblige you and Mr. Wilford,' said Blanche, smiling, as she gave her hand to Dr. St. Vincent, and held up her lips for his kiss of betrothal.

'That's right. Now we will go and have something to eat,' answered the widow, passing her arm through Blanche's and leading her away, leaving the gentlemen to follow.

'That's a smart boy of yours, doctor,' observed Mr. Wilford as they followed the ladies.

'John Wilks? very. A true Cornstalk. You can't fancy his last request.'

'What was it?'

'Only that I would take him into partnership, as he wanted to get married!'

'Modest of him!'

'Oh, that is one of the characteristics of young Australia. Their motto is "Advance," you know.'

'I suppose you consented?'

'Well, I asked the youth to give me time to think it over.'

At this moment they heard the widow's voice storming at the kitchen door. She was saying:

'Bridget, you know one of our conditions was that no followers were to be allowed.'

'Yes, ma'am; but Barney Moore is on duty.'

'What does he want?'

'Well, you see, ma'am,' observed Barney, coming out from behind Bridget, and wiping his greasy lips with his dirty hands in a furtive manner, 'I only came just to give yez some intilligence from head-quarters about the thief who stole your money; and not liking to disturb quality in their rambles, I modestly went into the kitchen to wait until yez would be disengaged.'

'And what is this intelligence, Mr. Barney Moore?'

'Well, ma'am, the police have tracked the count to Queensland.'

'Yes; and have they caught him?'

'No, ma'am; but they've got some good clues, which they think will lead to something.'

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.

Stirling, September 1893.

WORK IS OUR LIFE.

"Show me what you can do and I will show you what you are."

Lord STANLEY (now Earl of Derby), in an Address to the Students of Glasgow, said: "As work is our life, show me what you can do and I will show you what you are."

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